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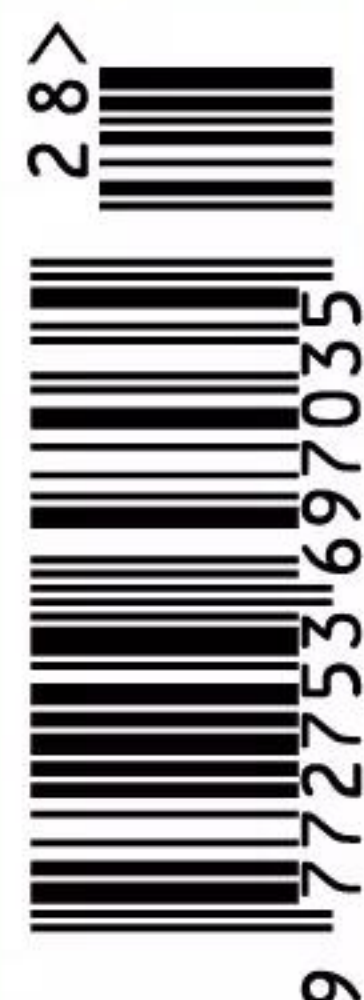
MASERATI LEGENDS

THE TRIDENT'S GREATEST ROAD AND RACE CARS



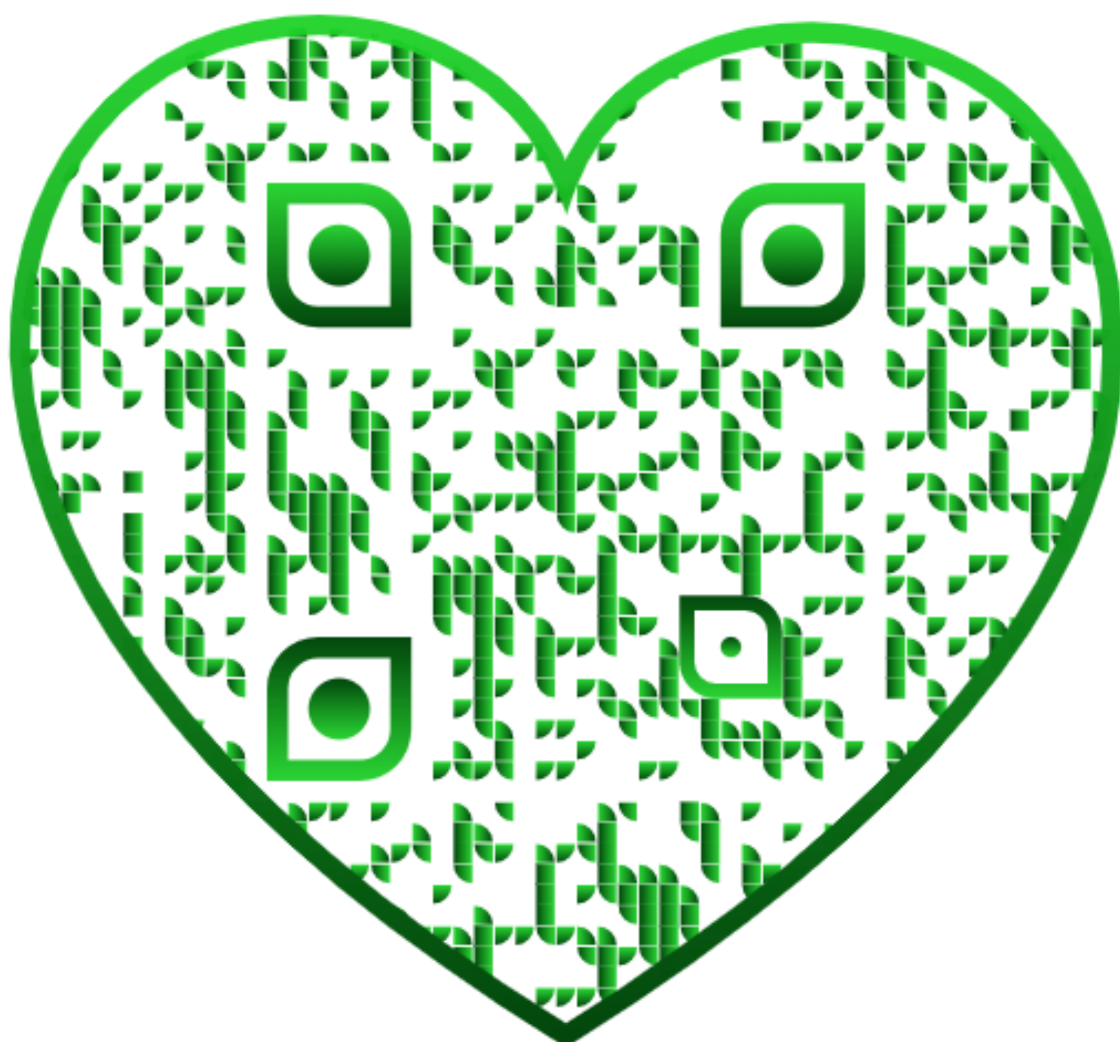
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Welcome

Maserati holds a unique appeal among the greatest names of the Italian industry. It's as famous as Ferrari or Lamborghini, but somehow its vehicles have flown under the radar in a way its showier compatriots never have.

Yet it is far older than either of them, established in Bologna in 1914 by brothers Alfieri, Bindo, Ettore and Ernesto. It was a true family affair, with another sibling, artist Mario, creating its famous trident, but by '37 their eponymous firm was left in the safe hands of the Orsi clan.

Today it's known for luxurious, high-performance GTs (and, bizarrely, SUVs), yet Maserati was born into the heat of competition: one of its first cars was driven to a class win on the 1926 Targa Florio by Alfieri. Success continued, from Grands Prix to sports cars to Indy, but in 1957 the works team was retired as the brand focused on exotic roadgoing GTs – a baton grabbed by new owner Citroën in '68. After instability under the control of Alejandro de Tomaso from 1975, Fiat stepped in and ironically it was when helmed by one-time rival Ferrari that Maserati roared back to health; today it's once again with Citroën as part of the Stellantis stable.

We've gathered our top Maserati stories from the past 30 years of C&SC (turn to p5 to find out when each first appeared), split nominally into racers and road cars, but the lines were always blurred: it wasn't unusual for a track car to become a glamorous road machine and vice versa.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

Editor in chief, *Classic & Sports Car*



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ISSUE 28

CLASSIC & SPORTS CAR
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Advertisements are accepted only upon Haymarket Media Group's standard
Terms of Acceptance of Advertising, copies of which are available from the
Advertising Sales Department of *Classic & Sports Car*

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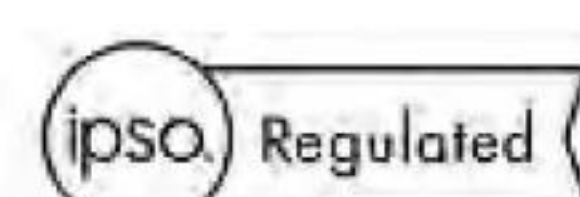
Classic & Sports Car (ISSN 0263318X, USPS 25178) is published monthly
by Haymarket Media Group, Bridge House, 69 London Road, Twickenham
TW1 3SP, United Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named
World Container INC 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. POSTMASTER: send address
changes to *Classic & Sports Car*, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container INC
150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.

Subscription records are maintained at Haymarket Media Group, Bridge
House, 69 London Road, Twickenham TW1 3SP. Air Business Ltd is acting as
our mailing agent. Distributed in the UK by Frontline Ltd, 1st floor – Stuart
House, St John's Street, Peterborough, Cambs PE1 5DD, 01733 555161

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(ARTmax) 38122 Braunschweig; +49 (0)531 38004 0; info@haymarket.de
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MASERATI MOVERS & SHAKERS

The Trident marque has endured a turbulent past. Here, the family archivist identifies the key figures from the first 100 years, from brothers in arms to the mighty Fiat Group

WORDS **ADOLFO ORSI** PHOTOGRAPHY **HISTORICA SELECTA**



ALFIERI MASERATI

1887-1932

After serving an apprenticeship with Isotta Fraschini, this racing driver and engineer opened a

garage in Bologna in 1914, and patented his spark-plug design during WW1. He built the Tipo 26 – the first Maserati-badged car – in 1926, and won his class on the Targa Florio before dedicating himself to the business.



ERNESTO MASERATI

1898-1975

The youngest of the seven Maserati brothers, a good racing driver and an excellent engineer – as well

as being his brother Alfieri's closest collaborator. After Alfieri died, he took charge of the engineering side of firm, overseeing the 8CM and 4CL among others, as well as the later A6-1500. In 1947, he left to establish Osca.



ETTORE MASERATI

1894-1990

In 1908, Ettore joined Carlo (1881-1910) at Junior in Milan, but after his eldest brother's death he

worked with Alfieri at Isotta Fraschini. In Bologna, he supervised the manufacture and assembly of the cars. When the firm moved to Modena he took charge of the spark-plug business. He later joined Ernesto in setting up Osca.



BINDO MASERATI

1883-1980

The most extravagant of the brothers, Bindo joined Alfieri and Ettore at Isotta Fraschini in 1910 as a test-driver.

He co-drove Aymo Maggi's Isotta 8ASS on the 1927 Mille Miglia, and allowed Maserati access to the foundry to cast magnesium components. He joined his brothers in 1932 after Alfieri's death, and ran the commercial side.



ADOLFO ORSI

1888-1972

This self-made man established the first steel plant in the Modena region, later moving into agricultural machinery and car

dealerships. He purchased Maserati in 1937, along with a 10-year agreement to retain the brothers' services. In 1940, he moved the firm to Modena and embarked on a period of expansion before Citroën took over.



OMAR ORSI

1918-1980

A 19-year-old law student when his father Adolfo purchased the company, Omar was made its CEO in the 1960s. Adolfo was

the decision-maker with the vision of growth, while Omar ran the day-to-day activity at the Viale Ciro Menotti factory. He dealt mainly with the sales side, but also worked with coachbuilders to define the Maserati style.

**ALBERTO MASSIMINO**

1895-1975

Formerly of Fiat and Scuderia Ferrari, Massimino joined Maserati in 1941 and became its technical

director in 1947. He developed the 4CLT/48 single-seater, the A6GCS *monofaro* and the A6G/2000. In 1952, he opened his own engineering studio, working for other Modenese firms such as Ferrari and De Tomaso.

**MEDARDO FANTUZZI**

1908-1986

From 1924 to '57, he was the *carrozziere* for all the Maserati racers, building the bodies for the single-seater

4CLT/48, A6GCM and 250F, plus sports cars including the A6GCS and 450S. After the company withdrew from racing, Fantuzzi collaborated with Ferrari, for which he built the bodies of all the works cars up to 1965.

**GIOACCHINO COLOMBO**

1903-1987

Vittorio Jano's right-hand man at Alfa Romeo in the '20s had a spell with Scuderia Ferrari before returning

to Turin and developing the Alfetta. In late 1952, he designed the A6GCS/53 and A6GCM for Maserati, projects that led to the 250F GP car. He later moved to Bugatti, and designed more than 175 engines in a glittering career.

**VALERIO COLOTTI**

1925-2008

In 1953, Colotti moved across to Maserati and became responsible for practically everything – except the engine and

the bodywork – on all the racing models. After the factory's withdrawal from competition, Colotti started up as an independent, designing gearboxes for Lola, Cooper and Lotus. Colotti Trasmissioni is still active.

**GIULIO ALFIERI**

1924-2002

Having joined Maserati in 1953, this legendary Parma-born engineer and noted innovator became the company's technical director two

years later. He was responsible for the development of the legendary 250F, the sports cars of the late 1950s and the Tipo 60/61 'Birdcage' – as well as being the father of the 3500GT. Alfieri left the business in 1975.

**PIERRE BERCOT**

1903-1991

As chairman of Citroën, Bercot asked Maserati to develop a 2.7-litre V6 engine for the car that became the SM. This led to Citroën buying

a controlling stake in the firm two years later. The French managers struggled to relate to an artisan business – the Orsi family left in 1971, and Citroën's own problems led to Maserati going into administration in 1975.

**ALEJANDRO DE TOMASO**

1928-2003

With the support of his American heiress wife, Isabelle Haskell, de Tomaso established his own car firm in 1959.

He tried to buy Maserati in 1968, and succeeded in 1975 when the Citroën era came to an end. He launched the Biturbo model during his time in charge and purchased Innocenti before selling Maserati to Fiat in 1993.

**EUGENIO ALZATI**

1935-2014

When Fiat took over Maserati from De Tomaso in 1993, Alzati became CEO.

Thanks to his infectious enthusiasm, he was able to motivate everyone at Viale Ciro Menotti, launching the Ghibli Cup Championship and resurrecting the company. This modest Milanese manager played an important role in keeping Maserati alive.

**LUCA DI MONTEZEMOLO**

B.1947

When the decision was made to merge Maserati with Ferrari, di Montezemolo was put in charge of making

it happen. He closed the plant for six months while it was refitted, introduced a new V8 engine and returned Maserati to the American market. He recently called the firm's 'relaunch' his biggest success as a manager.

**KARL-HEINZ KALBFELL**

1949-2013

Following a long career with BMW, Kalbfell arrived at the Fiat Group in 2005 to direct Alfa and Maserati,

eventually dedicating himself to the latter. He focused on 'Excellence through Passion', refined the models and launched the MC series and GranTurismo project. A true enthusiast, he kept a Manx Norton in his office.

**HARALD WESTER**

B.1958

Maserati often changed CEOs in the 2000s, but Wester is the one who has stayed the longest, having been there since

2008. He arrived at Ferrari in 1999 with a CV that included Volkswagen and Audi. He was then made chief technical officer of the Fiat Group. At Maserati, he has overseen the new Quattroporte and Ghibli models.

**LORENZO RAMACIOTTI**

B.1948

This former Pininfarina CEO has Maserati in his blood – his father was one of Omar Orsi's best friends, and he spent

his youth in Modena. He had a hand in the 2003 Quattroporte and, in 2007, he was asked to become the Fiat Group's chief of styling, giving him responsibility for the appearance of the next generation of Maseratis.

Tourer *de force*

Descended from a Grand Prix racer but with seating for four, this unique Tipo 26 was born for the track – but in retirement it has become a sublime long-distance machine

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY **MICK WALSH**





High-performance two-seat sports cars with detuned Grand Prix mechanicals were a relatively regular development in the early days of motoring, but supercharged four-seaters were a rarer breed. During the late 1920s and early '30s, Mercedes-Benz and Alfa Romeo built the famed S-type and 8C for long-distance races, but the scarcest of these exotic pre-war 'tourers' was the 1930 Maserati Tipo 26 Sports, a long-chassis design developed for England's most prestigious race, the Brooklands Double Twelve, and the Irish GP. Today, just one of these *lungo* Tipo 26s survives of the two special orders to the Maserati family – better known as *Il Fratelli*.

The fledgling concern, funded by a spark-plug business and the patronage of wealthy enthusiasts, had developed a reputation for competitive twin-cam machines, handbuilt with pride at its small Bologna base. The sleek, supercharged two-seaters had impressed Max Morris, director of London carburettor manufacturer RAG Patents Ltd. In late 1930, with backing from mystery Irish millionaire RA Garston, and encouraged by British-based Italian Edgar Fronteras, Morris ordered two special Maseratis to promote his firm.

To match the four-seater regulations for the over-1500cc class in England, the frames were extended by 150mm with deeper, thicker rails to take the detuned 2.5-litre twin-cam straight-eight. The cars were supplied with bonnet and scuttle but no rear bodywork, retaining the Tipo 26's distinctive sloping radiator – albeit mounted higher, with a larger core.

The planned debut was the Double Twelve on 9 May 1931, a two-part, 24-hour race around the torturous Brooklands track. Who built the body isn't known, but the style contrasted with the factory racers. Featuring a wood frame clad with Rexine, plus four seats and a full-length hood, the long-chassis Tipo 26 had a dynamo, starter and lighting system. Morris replaced the Weber with an RAG carburettor, and the cars were prepared by LC Rawlence & Co on The Cut, near London's Waterloo, under the supervision of engineer RA 'Dickie' Oates, who carried out much of the testing.

Just one car – chassis 2518, as featured here – was finished in time for the Double Twelve, to be driven by Captain George Eyston and Giulio Ramponi, who was both a top mechanic and a trusted pilot. The second car, for Fronteras and Oates, didn't make the start. The team included 28-year-old Walter Ernest Wilkinson, a talented spannerman who later went to work with Ecurie Ecosse and BRM. Better known as 'Wilkie', the Londoner had his first experience as riding mechanic in the Maserati. Sitting alongside Eyston around Brooklands at 120mph was never forgotten, as he recalled in his autobiography: 'After the 8am start, for almost the whole of the first 12 hours we drove right up at the top of the banking, close to the unprotected rim. At first it was a terrifying experience, and even after I got used to it, it was still somewhat shattering.'



At speed on the rough surface, with Hartford friction dampers locked, the chassis took a pounding: 'The Maserati leaped and crashed over the bumps, slamming into the concrete with bone-jarring force... The racket from the exhaust, even with the compulsory silencer, was deafening.' On top of all that, Wilkinson had only a small aeroscreen plus linen flying helmet and goggles, but most painful was the heat from the gearbox and exhaust, which badly burnt his leg. The conditions took their toll on the car, too, with Eyston and Ramponi

'The Maserati leaped and crashed over the bumps, slamming down into the concrete with bone-jarring force'

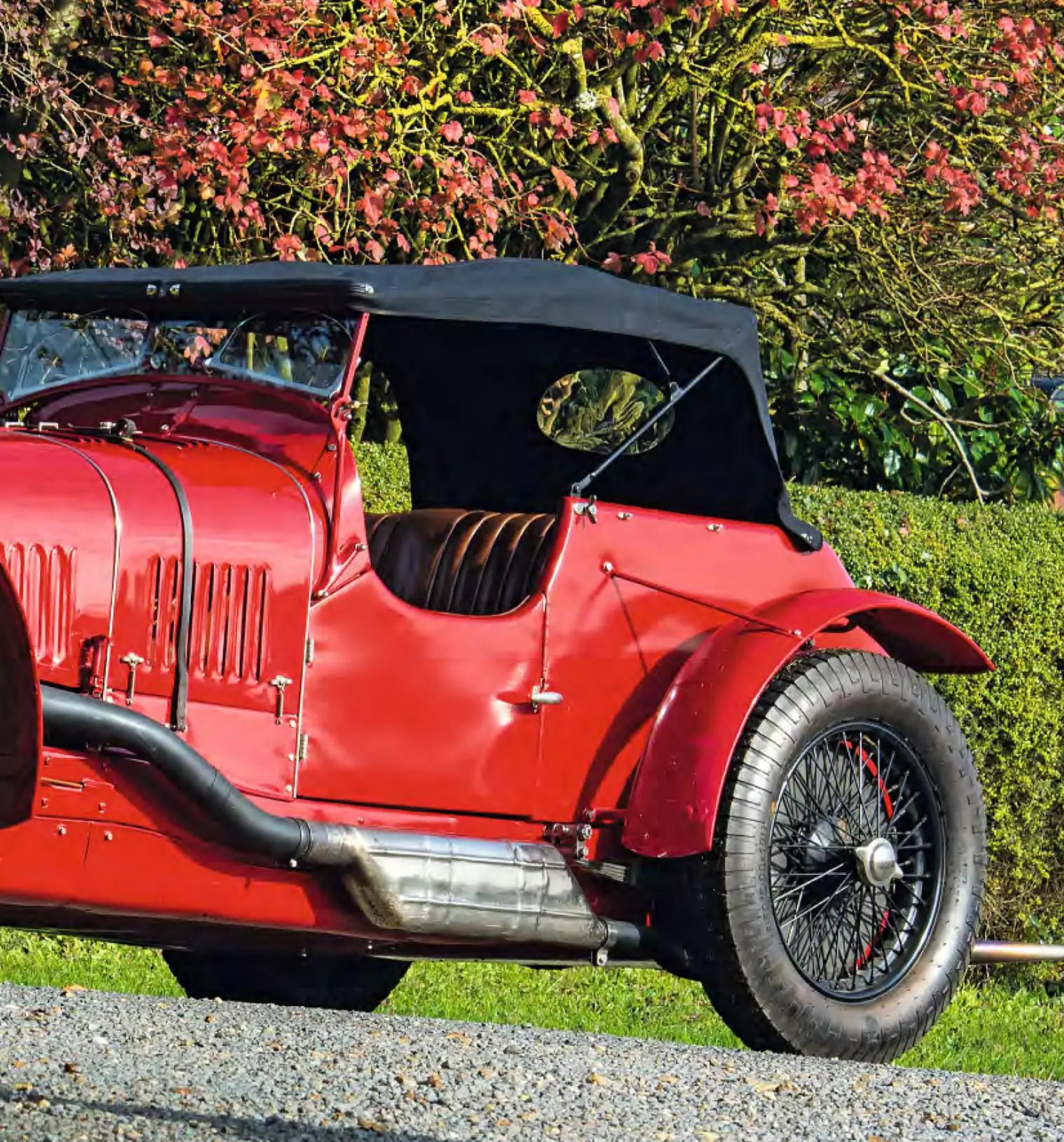
forced to stop as Wilkinson jumped out to fit new wing stays. 'These were only minor problems,' he concluded. 'The car went very fast all day, like a proverbial bomb.'

On the last lap of the first race (Brooklands couldn't stage night events, so the race was split over the weekend) the crownwheel and pinion gave up after a brutal landing on the Byfleet Banking. Ramponi pulled over and, with no spare axle available, the car was withdrawn.

Two months later the two cars, chassis 2518 and 2516, were taken to Dublin for the Irish GP. Thanks to local patron Madam Garston, the budget was stretched to enlist Giuseppe Campari as star driver in the second car. When teammate Eyston discovered how much the Italian's riding mechanic was being paid, he insisted that his man's fee should be equal. 'That £20 was the biggest sum of money I ever had in my working life,' Wilkinson recalled. He certainly earned it in the dramatic race around the 4¼-mile course across Phoenix Park.

Maserati's main rival in the Éireann Cup for over-1500cc sports cars was the first Alfa 8C, chassis 2111002, which had been ordered by 'Bentley Boy' Henry 'Tim' Birkin. The Zagato-bodied Long Chassis was completed late by the factory, so chum Clive Gallop collected it days before the race and drove from Milan to Dublin. Despite the event falling a week before Le Mans, entries included the Hon Brian Lewis in a works Talbot 105, a pair of privateer S-type Mercedes headed by Lord Howe, and an Invicta Low Chassis and an elderly Austro-Daimler.

After the problems at Brooklands, Wilkinson devised an oiling system operated from the cockpit via a grease gun and flexible pipe, so the axle could be topped up during the race; the hard-working engineer also fabricated a quick-refuelling funnel. The Maserati proved fast in practice, with Campari timed at 120mph on the straight compared with Birkin's 115mph in the Alfa, but the Italian machinery was no match for the thunderous S-types, headed by Howe.



From top: snug cockpit has the feel of a thoroughbred but with room for four; famous Trident crest of the Maserati brothers



Tipo 26 Sports in the pits at Brooklands for the ill-fated 1931 Double Twelve. It would retire with axle problems

Race day arrived cold and damp, with more rain forecast, but huge crowds turned out to see Campari – and they weren't disappointed. When the president of the Republic dropped the flag, a maroon fired over the stand and a spectacular battle began. Birkin made a demon start, sliding along the wet grass to pass the Mercedes, but by the end of the first lap Howe and BO Davies were leading Campari from Birkin, with Eyston's Maser close behind. Howe soon equalled Rudi Caracciola's 1930 lap record at 91.3mph, but behind the S-type the two Maseratis were running strongly. Eyston passed the Alfa Romeo to give the Trident team the lead on handicap, and when the rain arrived the pace of the German big guns slowed dramatically. As lightning flashed across the dark sky, the deluge turned biblical and Birkin's wet-weather confidence carried him into the lead on the waterlogged course.

While Eyston struggled with flooded ignition, Campari charged after the Alfa, but again Maserati's fortune faded. Birkin was in his sights when the Alfa's tail slid wide at Gough corner and the Italian hero was sprayed with mud and stones, smashing his goggles. With fragments in his eye, Campari reluctantly returned to the pits for attention from a surgeon, leaving a nervous Ramponi to take the wheel. The mechanic was no match for Campari's pace, and, after learning of the car's lower position, the famous ace was spotted in the middle of the pit straight with a bandaged eye, waving down Ramponi so he



Spare wheel sits in a neat recessed well in the tail; complex hood had to be remade from scratch



could retake the wheel. From a lap down, and now using only one eye, Campari produced one of the greatest drives of his career as he stormed through the field. The Irish crowd loved the spectacle, cheering all around the course, but luck and low fuel were against Campari and he finished three minutes behind the Alfa, in second place, while Eyston took fourth in the other Maserati.

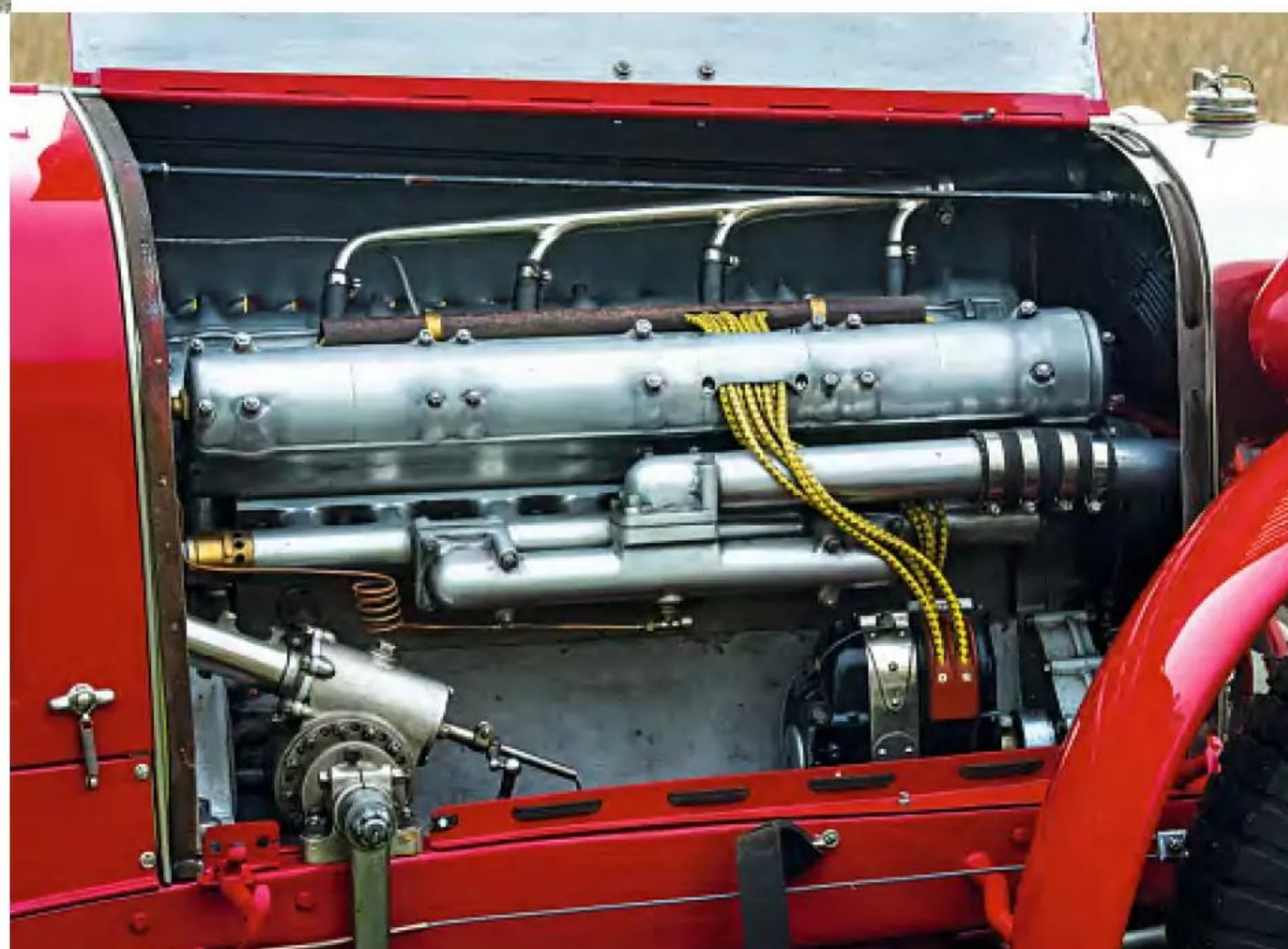
Pathé footage of the race reveals the differing styles of Birkin and Campari in the wet, the English baronet all over the road while the Italian masterfully drifted his Maserati. You can imagine the excited conversations over Guinness as fans dried out in the Dublin pubs.

The team entered just one more race, the RAC Tourist Trophy. With Campari now back in an Alfa, Eyston came eighth while Fronteras failed to finish a lap after head-gasket failure.

Like so many businesses in the early 1930s, RAG was knocked out by the Depression and, as part payment for debts, Oates claimed ownership of both Maseratis. Campari's chassis 2518 was sold on and continued to race at Brooklands, before later being thrashed around the sands at Southport and Saltburn. While the second Tipo 26 Sports ended up in South Africa, 2518 was enjoyed on the road until the engine threw a conrod.

After WW2, an Autovia V8 and then a Ford flathead V8 were tried, but thankfully the great car was saved by the Hartley brothers in 1952 and restored by Maserati fanatic Anthony. The talented engineer lovingly returned 2518 to authentic specification, complete with RAG carburettor. Whenever the rare and highly original Tipo 26 appeared at events during the 1960s and '70s it attracted huge interest. Hartley kept 2518 for nearly 57 years before his collection was auctioned off by Bonhams in 2012, when it sold for £1.6million – a veritable bargain when compared with the huge values of its Alfa Romeo 8C rivals.

The sole surviving Tipo 26 four-seater was entrusted to Sean Danaher, who has worked on a vast range of Bologna greats. His passion for the marque came from his father, Bob, and as a youngster he helped his dad restore the



Above: Campari's Maserati holds off the charging Talbot of Lewis in the Irish Grand Prix. Left: supercharged twin-cam straight-eight is a jewel

"The longer chassis gives it a better ride and more directional stability than the GP cars; the increase in weight also steadies it"

ex-Tazio Nuvolari 8CM for Colin Crabbe. That indoctrination launched a career of rebuilding, testing and racing historic Maseratis, and the arrival of the ex-Campari four-seater marked a full circle. "Among enthusiasts, Hartley was a bit of a lone wolf," recalls Sean, "but at a Maserati Club event in the late '70s I got a ride with him in 2518 around Castle Ashby. It felt much more civilised than other pre-war Maseratis I'd driven, thanks to the user-friendly tune and rattle-free wood-and-fabric body."

Four decades later, that very car arrived at Sean's Suffolk workshop for post-auction sorting, and again in 2015 for a cosmetic rebuild to authentic Irish GP style. The body was sent to Graham Moss to have the original wood frame repaired and re-covered with Rexine before a repaint. Sean then turned his attention to recreating the distinctive scuttle and 'screens so the lost hood could be remade:

distinctive apron. The wing stays, radiator and headlight supports were all returned to original style, and the car was given a thorough mechanical rebuild because the new owner wanted to enjoy driving it. An exhaust system was made including a Brooklands-style fishtail so the original could be saved. During testing, Sean's observations from that first run in 2518 were confirmed: "The longer chassis gives it a better ride and more directional stability than the Grand Prix cars. The increase in weight also steadies it. The steering is high-geared and hard work at low speeds, yet very direct. The cable braking is adequate, but on a par with a Bugatti. With wider ratios and extra flywheel weight, the beefy gearbox took getting used to as I found myself changing too quickly."

For Sean, the Maserati straight-eight is one of the most exciting units of the era. He says: "We put it back on a Weber, which has a flat-spot from idle, but the mid-range is impressive and then it really goes, with a 105mph top speed. This softer tune gives 145bhp at 4500rpm. With nearly 20cwt [2240lb], it's not going to compete with a lightweight Frazer Nash on the track, but this would make a fantastic fast tourer for a run around the Scottish distilleries."

Were I the lucky owner, I'd take this awesome machine to Ireland to retrace the Phoenix Park course, before heading across the country for a road trip along the Wild Atlantic Way. 



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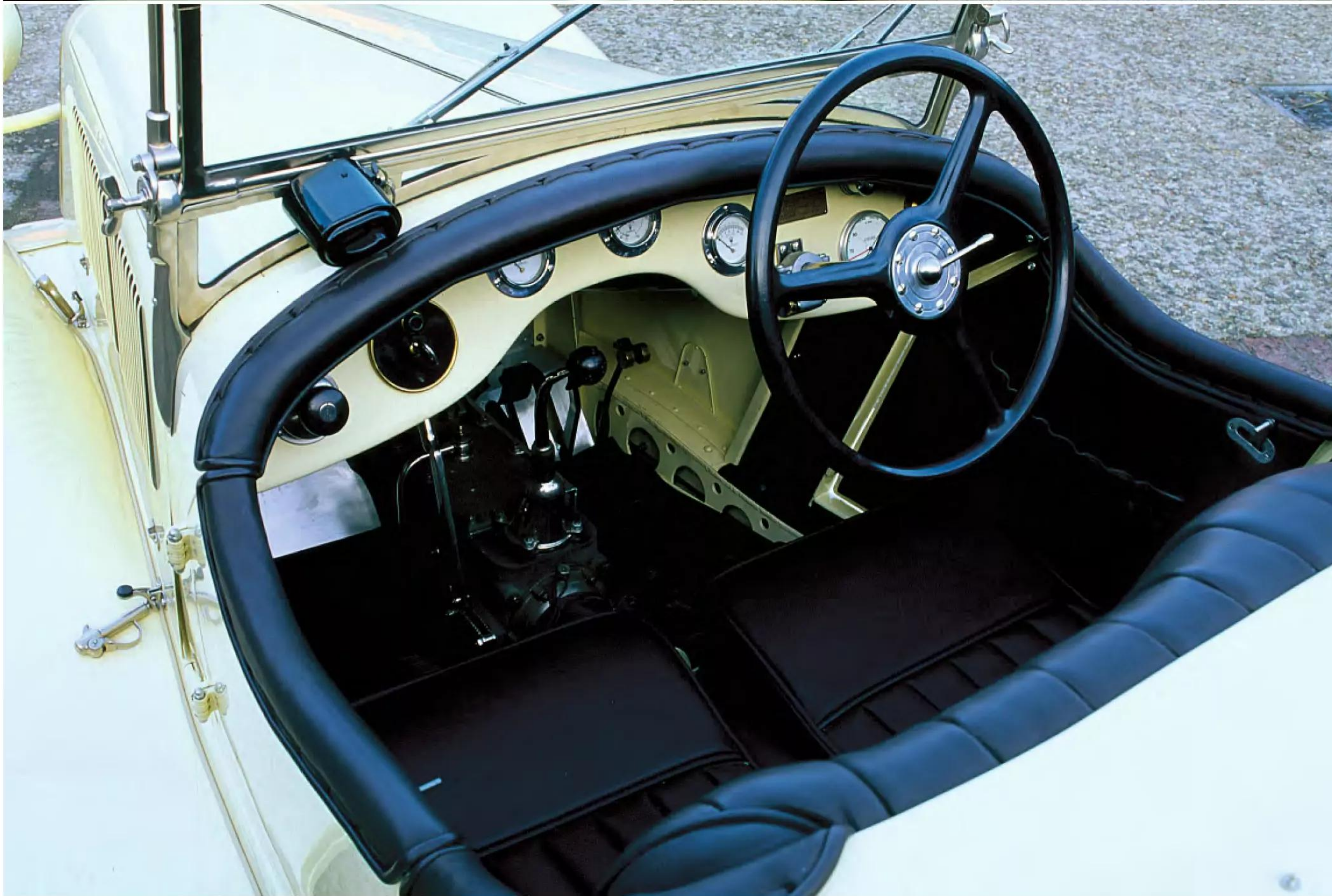
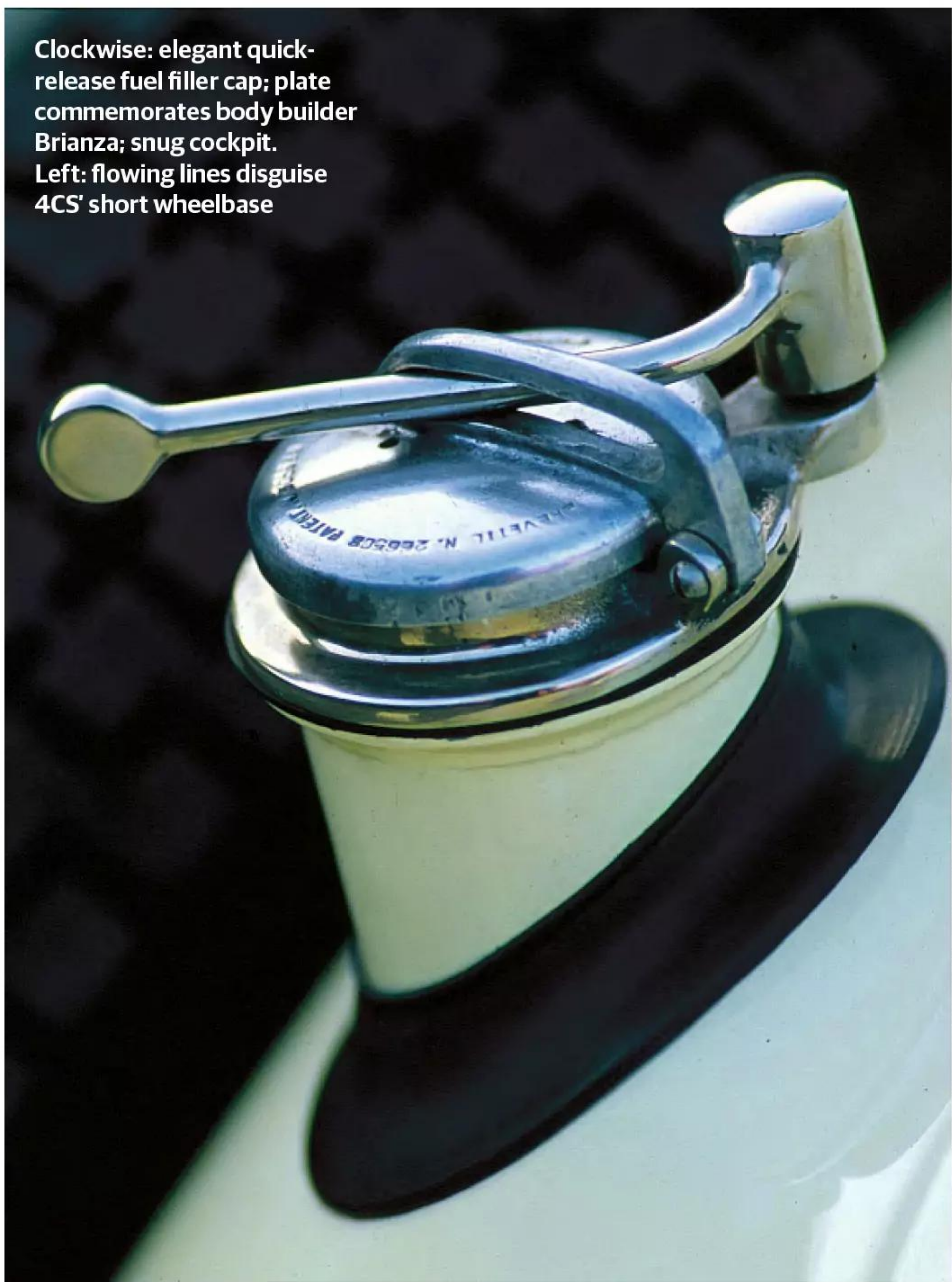
CREAM

This unique 4CS roadster became a single-seater in the 1930s, but it's now back to its former glory after 20 years in hiding

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TIM WREN**

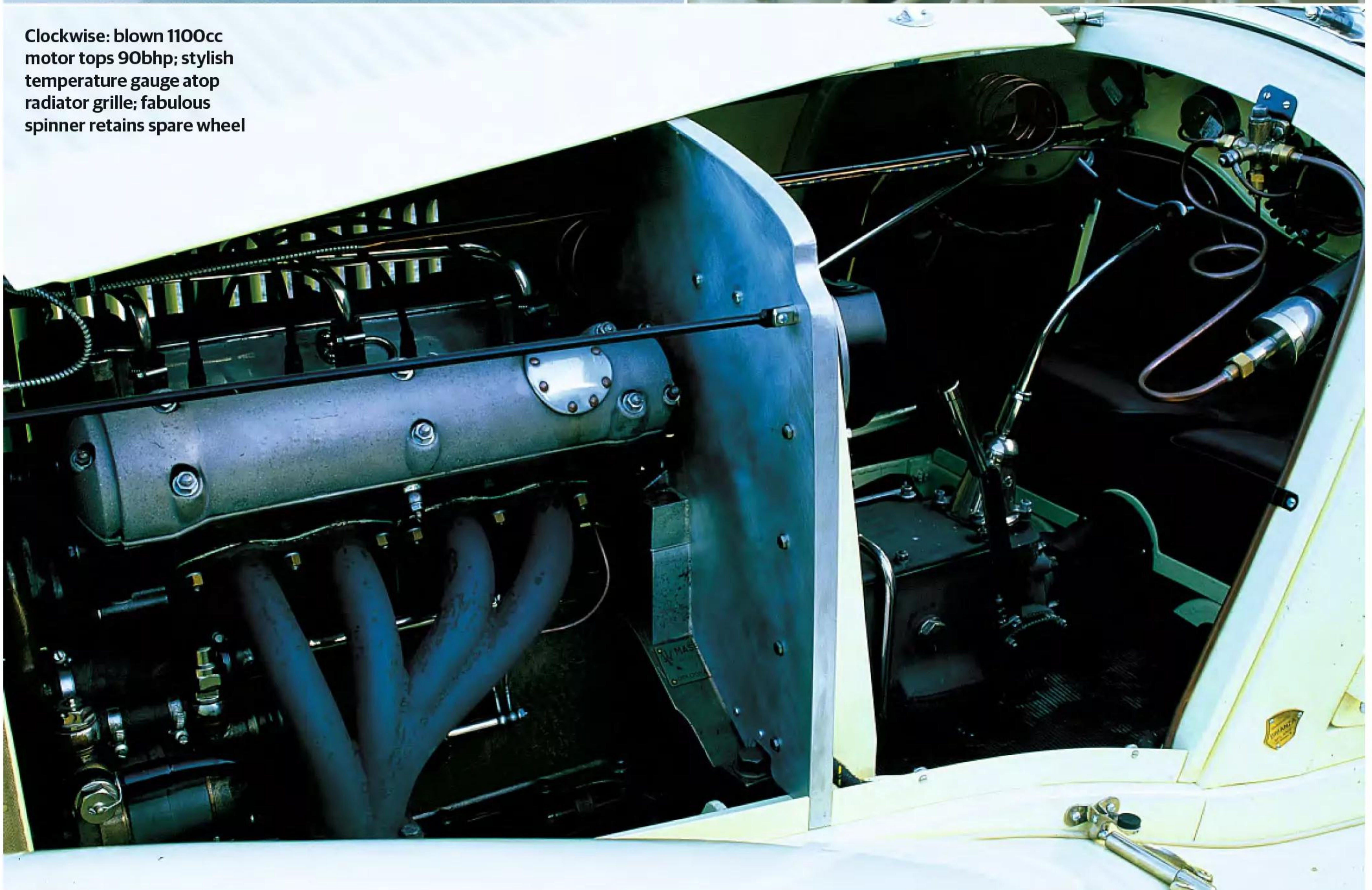
Clockwise: elegant quick-release fuel filler cap; plate commemorates body builder Brianza; snug cockpit.

Left: flowing lines disguise 4CS' short wheelbase

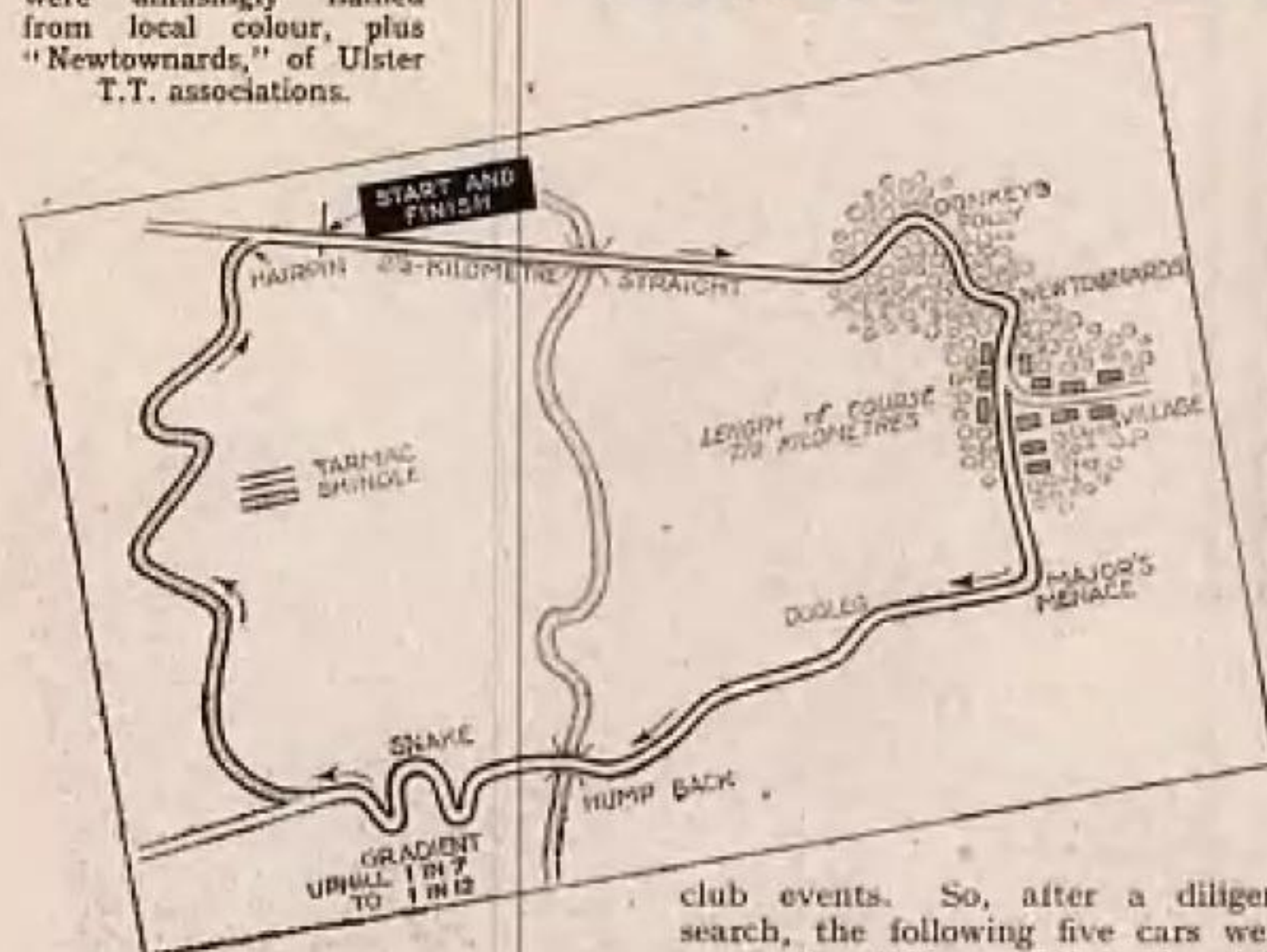




Clockwise: blown 1100cc motor tops 90bhp; stylish temperature gauge atop radiator grille; fabulous spinner retains spare wheel



The circuit, about 4½ miles round, near Asmara, in Eritrea. Various hazards were amusingly named from local colour, plus "Newtownards," of Ulster T.T. associations.



ASMARÁ had fallen quietly. Some evenings later the Major sauntered into the officers' bar and bought himself a drink. Three captains and a subaltern were idly reminiscing when the Major arrived, and it was evident that past racing history was of general interest. The Major joined in, and that was how it all began.

These men were assorted, but all keen motorists. A famous Scottish regiment provided one captain, Ordnance another and R.A.S.C. the third. The Scottish captain proudly claimed to have once run at Shelsley; the captain of Ordnance had obviously been born with a spanner in his mouth. Sheer enthusiasm was the only claim the others could muster, whilst the Major, with some superiority, recounted his pit work at Donington and his connection with those who raced.

The Day's Findings

When a town surrenders all sorts of things are requisitioned, and in the process all sorts of cars come to light. Small wonder, then, that when two nights later the same crowd gathered the conversation was: "I found a lovely Alfa to-day." "I found a wonderful Maserati all wrapped up." "I know where there is a full G.P. Monoposto," and so on. And then, naturally, "Why not let's have a race?"

The young well-to-do Italian even in Asmara was not going without his racing, and it seems that there was enough enthusiasm for two full-scale "Round the Houses" and two long-distance 100-kilometre road races annually, as well as various sports car

KHAKI in



The Story of a Hitherto Unchronicled Private Race

very fine machine with its double o.h.c. and independent torsion bar suspension. The Major swore it could do two hundred, but you know how enthusiasm gets a man.

No doubt rank asserted itself, for we found the Major at the wheel of a perfectly good 1½-litre Monoposto G.P. Maserati of 1939 vintage. This car was first bought by Castelbarco from the factory and raced at Pescara and Acerbo in 1939, finishing



The 1939 1½-litre Grand Prix Maserati Monoposto, with torsion bar front and rear suspension, originally a Tripoli G.P. car, which had been used in the local races before the war. The author comments, "Wouldn't this have been grand for the Nuffield Trophy?"

second, and in the Tripoli G.P. in 1939, where it is thought to have finished fifth. Evidently it was brought to Asmara for some big local Grand Prix. It hadn't turned a wheel for six months, but it started more or less first pull. It must have been a

compression and a maximum of about ninety, which had been in daily use. This was driven by the Scottish captain. The third Alfa, driven by the R.A.S.C. captain, was a 1,750 c.c. sports two-seater of about 1935, apparently standard; it clocked 83.8 m.p.h.

CLOVER

Collected from the Italians. Three Alfas and a Maserati, the latter containing the author, who was "otherwise engaged" on the occasion of the wartime race described.



The Tripoli G.P. Monoposto Maser, being attended to by an ex-Ferrari mechanic, a prisoner of war, and a great "find" for the Service scuderia.



Lastly, the subaltern was aboard a 1933 1½-litre Maserati sports two-seater. This car won its class in the local event for three successive years, 1935-6-7. It had normal suspension, good acceleration and a maximum around 90 m.p.h.

Now for somewhere to race. Even Asmara had its D.A.P.M., and normal military traffic made local roads impossible, so a reconnaissance party was formed and eventually a suitable place was selected. The diagram shows clearly that no easy circuit was chosen. These men were tough and had fought in a tough campaign; they were determined to race in like manner.

Italian Racing Mechanic

So far fortune had smiled and the smile grew wider, for a prisoner of war, who was none other than "Dino," sometime mechanic to Villorosi at Monza, came forth, saying, "Oh, excuse, please." He cared for each car in turn, and like all true racing mechanics, slaved incessantly. It seemed politic to complete all

adjustments, fuelling and the usual preliminaries during the morning in Asmara and then to move off quietly at 1.30 p.m., when all but the chosen would be at lunch. This thoroughly and gently warmed up all the cars, and on arrival at the circuit, and after posting the necessary pickets, they went off at intervals of two minutes to do a couple of practice laps. Handicaps were then discussed and fixed as follows:—

	Scratch
Monoposto G.P. Maserati	1 min.
"Howe's" Alfa-Romeo	1 min. 30 sec.
Sports 2.3 Alfa-Romeo	2 min.
1,750 c.c. Alfa-Romeo	



Maserati being still a good half-minute behind. There was a thrilling dog fight between the two big Alfa-Romeos on lap two, with the Howe car in the rear. This went on till eventually in a mad rush on the gravel section the ex-Howe car took the lead to start off on lap three with a clear run.

Baulking the Major

Meanwhile the "1½" Alfa was having plug trouble and was easily passed by the scratch car. At the same time on another section of the course a duel was being fought between the sports Maserati and the sports Alfa. Also the Major was getting rather worried because the little Alfa had held him up through the winding section and it had been impossible to gain the requisite time on handicap to win. About this time the sports Alfa was running second and gradually gaining on the Howe Alfa, both cars running neck-and-neck down the straight. The latter went fast into a corner, literally on the skid limit but getting through, whereas the sports Alfa braked furiously, made a monumental mess

Another occasion—getting ready for a small event organized by the author one Sunday afternoon. It almost recaptured the old atmosphere, he remarks—and they did in fact get the smell of racing oil.

The Autocar story from 1943 tells the tale of the rare Maserati's discovery as a single-seater, alongside a quartet of Alfa Romeos and a trident sports car

Some sixty-eight years after it wowed visitors at the 1932 Milan Auto Show, the unique Brianza-bodied Maserati 4CS did it all over again when it appeared at the International Classic Motor Show in November 2000. Against a mouthwatering line-up of big-bore Ferraris and Masers, this exquisite cream spider won over the judges for a top award.

Before the Second World War, the Maserati brothers were almost entirely focused on competition machinery, so a road car was a seriously exotic attraction. Its lucky owners during *Il Duce's* regime included Giuseppe Gilera of motorcycle fame and Count Castelbarco, an amateur Maserati racer.

During the 1930s, sadly, this stylish machine lost its original coachwork and was modified into a single-seater, such was the temptation of its pure-bred specification. Historic racing specialist Tony Merrick has recently rebuilt chassis 1114 to its former show glory, but when the project arrived at his workshop, 20 years earlier, its identity was a mystery.

A lucky break was the discovery of tax records in Milan that matched chassis 1114 to its original Italian registration, 63290 MI. By coincidence, pre-war Alfa Romeo authority Simon Moore found a fascinating article called 'Khaki in Clover', published in the slim, 24 September 1943 edition of *The Autocar*, about

a stash of pre-war Italian sports cars discovered by the British Army in Eritrea. A small group of officers – all of them unnamed for security reasons – requisitioned the two Alfa Romeo 8Cs and a pair of 6C-1750s, plus two Maseratis, a sports model and a single-seater, from the township of Asmara.

The soldiers were all mad-keen motorsport enthusiasts, as *The Autocar* reported: 'The captain of ordnance had obviously been born with a spanner in his mouth... whilst the Major, with some superiority, recounted his pit work

'He was just far enough behind to catch the rueful expressions of the Alfa driver and the donkey'

at Donington.' Together, they hatched the idea of a race and a 4.5-mile track was mapped out on local roads, away from military traffic, while a prisoner of war who was a former mechanic to Luigi Villorosi was enlisted to prepare the cars. Pickets were posted around the course before practice to determine the handicaps. The race report reads like a chapter from *Biggles*, as the Alfas and Masers battled around the dusty circuit with plenty of 'sheer

daring', lots of 'neck-and-neck action' and a generous dose of 'furious braking'.

Unfortunately, however, a 'thoughtless donkey sauntered onto the course', causing the two leading Alfas to collide. Despite a crunched wing, the ex-Lord Howe 8C-2300 managed to rejoin just as the scratch man in the *monoposto* Maserati caught up, its pilot 'just far enough behind to laugh and feel superior as he caught the rueful expressions of both 6C-1750 driver and the donkey'. The Maserati then passed the Alfa through the 'snake', its dusty trail causing the vanquished rival to slow. On the final lap the baby Maser extended its lead to win after 52 mins, and was timed across a mile section of the start straight at an impressive 94.24mph.

The atmospheric images reproduced with this report clearly show a registration on the single-seater's nose cowl, matching that in the Milan records for the 4CS. How the car found its way to England is unknown, but the Major may have pulled a few strings and shipped it home. Three years later it appeared at Prescott, complete with new sports-car coachwork, and the 15-year-old Maserati impressively won its class, driven by A Hennings. Tony hasn't discovered any more about this owner/driver, although Denis Jenkinson was convinced that Hennings was the mystery Major from Eritrea and believed that he came from the Brighton area. Tony hopes British Army records might throw some light on his identity.

In the early 1950s the car was sold to the USA, then 20 years later London-based dealer and Maserati fan Dan Margulies discovered its sad remains and shipped it back, knowing nothing of the car's history. The body and Technauto independent torsion-bar suspension were clearly non-original, but there were similarities with a 4CS in the Rosso Bianco collection. Eric Stewart of rock band 10cc bought the project and eventually Tony took on its restoration.

"We knew it originally had a special Brianza body," recalls Tony, "because Luigi Orzini's Maserati history refers to a 'vivid yellow 4CS' on the coachbuilder's stand at the 1932 Salone dell'Automobile, but we had no photographs. Then historian Doug Nye suggested I contact the Biscaretti library in Turin, which turned up a shot of the Brianza stand. That image really sparked off the rebuild."

Tony entrusted the bodywork to Nick Jarvis: "He has a great eye for pre-WW2 design and did a fantastic job with so little reference." The Brianza styling has several features masterfully enhancing the profile of this short chassis with a wheelbase of just 96in. The long bonnet stretches right up the elegant windscreen frame and the unlinked 'Flying Star'-style wings exaggerate the car's length. Also, the engine sits well back in the chassis, allowing for a rakish radiator. Passionate Maserati enthusiast Cameron Millar even removed an authentic pair of early Bosch headlights from his

Vauxhall 30/98 for the 4CS – a perfect finishing touch to complement Nick's craftsmanship.

Meanwhile, Tony refitted the original-type leaf springs and a new front axle, but decided on later hydraulic brakes – a common upgrade to Maseratis in the 1930s. At some point the twin-cam 1100cc engine's original crankcase had been replaced by a bronze replica, which Tony reckons was cast in England during the late 1940s by a small foundry near Eaton. The camshaft geartrain and the Roots supercharger

'Taruffi must have had a mischievous grin as his 4CS ate into the advantage of the Alfas'

are both run off the crank nose and, like all pre-war Maseratis, the engineering is superb. "You could mount any piece on a plinth and it would be a pleasure to look at," says Tony. This jewel revs to 6000rpm and delivers a punchy 90bhp-plus, which gave Pierro Taruffi the edge over the MG K3s on the '34 Mille Miglia. With Guerrino Bertocchi as his trusty mechanic, and running on special doped fuel, Taruffi finished a remarkable fifth overall – well ahead of the Maser's much bigger-engined class rivals.

A short drive in this ivory beauty quickly affirms its brilliance, once you've contorted into the tricky cockpit. Although the dash has been cut away to allow more room for gearlever movement, the driving position isn't as tight as it looks and is much better than sporting Rileys of the same era. The pedal layout has been changed to a conventional right accelerator, but spacing is as close as a racer's. Even the fuel pressure has to be hand-primed like a GP car.

In the warm workshop the engine instantly starts from cold and guns this 700kg charger with real gusto. The clutch takes a hefty push and the action of the vintage 26M gearbox is surprisingly short and light for an early Maserati. The brakes are brilliant, while the steering is sharp but a little dead. There is minimal kickback even over the Berkshire potholes, however. At speed the chassis reveals brilliant poise, hinting at its racing roots, but, best of all, that gutsy heart wants to sing like a zesty tenor, its urgent low-down torque belying its junior capacity. Over the sinuous Futa and Raticosa passes 'The Silver Fox' Taruffi must have had a mischievous grin as his 4CS ate into the advantage of the bigger Alfas.

Post WW2, the spirit of this demon design went with the Maserati brothers to Osca. Maybe it's time the Trident marque reinvented the *barchetta* as a stablemate to its big GTs, rather than building bloated SUVs. True Maseratis should have no more than two seats. 



RACERS ADOPT COACHBUILT DISGUISE AND HEAD FOR THE HIGHWAYS

Most pre-war Maserati sports cars were thinly disguised racing machines. The sleek Tipo 26, for example, was transformed into a Mille Miglia model with basic wings, lights and external chassis boxes to carry tools and a battery – all of which could be stripped to make up the numbers in a minor Grand Prix. The most spectacular road cars were those chassis converted by wealthy enthusiasts.

Zagato clothed the fearsome Tipo V4 with a handsome spider body, enveloping its unsuccessful chassis and 4-litre, 300bhp U16 motor. This one-off survived the war, hidden in a Brussels warehouse, before the late John Howell saved it in the '50s.

The most elegant pre-WW2 model didn't last long. American playboy Whitney Straight had Gurney Nutting convert – at great

expense – his spare 8CM single-seater into a fabulous sports car. Sadly, Prince Bira broke the car for spares soon after its meticulous completion, but it has since been revived. With Ernesto Maserati's introduction of the Tipo A6 in 1946 (A in homage to founder Alfieri), the company had its first serious 'production' model. Pinin Farina created a sleek two-seater coupé prototype on the A6 for the

1947 Geneva Salon, but more conventional designs for a closed four seater and roadster followed. It built all but two of the 65 made.

But the true renaissance of coachbuilt bodies came with the A6G and A6GCS models. While Medardo Fantuui graced the sports-racer with delicious, taut curves, Pinin Farina, Zagato, Frua (above) and Vignale built some of the most beautiful Maseratis ever.

Maserati's chassis shows its racing roots, with brilliant poise. Handsome bodywork has now been beautifully reinstated after its time as a single-seater racer





Maserati's brutal beauty

This unique 8CM is not for the faint of heart. To drive it is to follow in the wheeltracks of Straight, Bira and Seaman

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



When you are asked to nominate the most beautiful racing car, the Maserati 8CM chassis 3011 should be high on any list. One of just 19 3-litre beauties that were

handbuilt in Bologna under the direction of Ernesto Maserati, this glorious machine mixes Italian, American, English and Thai influences through its development and long racing life. From every angle it looks majestic and superbly proportioned, while beneath its skin the supercharged, twin-overhead-cam engine and suspension are exquisitely made with extensive use of magnesium.

"It's a pure racing design made by proud engineers," enthuses specialist John Moore, who works on 3011. "There are no short cuts. The detailing – such as the engine's gear tower and the fantastic forged front axle – is amazing." As a former 'Buxted Boy' with Crosthwaite & Gardiner, John has been closely involved with some of the greatest racing cars, from Bugattis to Auto Unions.

Making 3011 particularly special are the refinements to both its looks and design by its wealthy first owner. Whitney Straight was just 21 when he ordered three 8CMs, but the New York-born racer already had an eye for style.

For the few years he raced, Straight's team cars were always immaculately turned out, and none more so than 3011. His allegiance to the Trident marque started with a beautiful black 26M that he refined and developed, including fitting a preselector transmission under the guidance of respected mechanic Giulio Ramponi. Yet Straight was unhappy with the new 8CM's whippy chassis, heavy gearchange and awkward styling, so his cars were immediately sent to Thomson & Taylor's Brooklands workshop.

Straight first met Ramponi on the buying trip to Bologna, and he enticed the talented Italian back to Britain to run a newly formed race team. Ramponi was closely connected with designers and with drivers, including Tazio Nuvolari, who had shared his concerns with regard to the disappointing early 8CMs. Back in England, this valuable insight and Ramponi's own ideas were used to refine Straight's racers.

Their revisions included replacing the Weber carburettor with an SU and increasing the blower speed to one and a half times that of the engine. They improved the cooling, too, and modified the rear suspension, before the project was dispatched to J Gurney Nutting for a new body. Straight no doubt had a hand in the aesthetics, and the result was one of the most attractive single-seaters of the early '30s. From the slanted grille to the muscular tail, the proportions were perfect; even the external exhaust had an elegant sweep.

Straight believed that the only colour for a racing car was black – as his older 26M had been finished – but for international events he was required to present the 8CMs in the American colours of a white body with a blue chassis. With Hugh Hamilton as the second driver, the team of 70mph Dodge lorries carrying the immaculate Maseratis headed to North Africa for 3011's debut at the ultra-fast Mellaha circuit for the Grand Prix of Tripoli.



Revelling in the Maserati's impressive straight-line speed, as well as the crisp bark from its elegant, unsilenced exhaust

A holed piston in practice spoiled its debut, but once back in England the car's dramatic pace was apparent. Straight set Fastest Time of the Day – and a new hill record of 40 secs – at Shelsley Walsh hillclimb.

So began the illustrious life of this great Maserati, with highlights of Straight's single season in 3011 including wins at Brooklands, Donington and South Africa, as well as impressive times up the greatest European hillclimbs: he finished as runner-up to the works German titans at Klausen. With the international events over, 3011 was back in the workshop for a repaint in black before seeing off the fastest 2-litre ERAs at Brooklands in October, where Straight set the fastest lap with twin rear wheels fitted.

After failing to secure an Auto Union for the 1935 season, Straight, still just 23, decided to retire and put his cars and transporters up for sale. Still smitten by the 8CM's spectacular performance, however, he indulged himself by converting 3012 into a sports car. Gurney Nutting produced a spectacular black-painted design, complete with heart-shaped grille,

and Straight's racing monogram replaced the Trident emblem as a badge.

His prized racer 3011 was slow to sell, but it was eventually acquired by privateer Harry Rose as a replacement for an outdated Alfa Romeo Monza. Ramponi continued to look after 3011 for Rose, and he hatched the idea of slotting in the brilliant young Richard Seaman for a one-off race at Donington. With the engine sleeved down to 2695cc, he won the British Empire Trophy.

When Rose decided to retire in 1936, the two-year-old Maserati was bought by Prince Chula for his cousin Bira, who wanted a proper racing car to substitute for his 'mickey mouse' *voiturette* ERAs and increase his competition experience. As with all of the cars in his superbly presented White Mouse equipe, 3011 was immediately repainted blue, and team manager Chula threw Bira in at the deep end with an entry at Phoenix Park. Starting as the scratch man, Bira set a blistering pace, lapping at more than 100mph, thrilling the Irish fans and finishing an impressive second on handicap, just behind an MG.



Drum brakes do a good job of reining in 8CM's power; period redline at 6500rpm, but Rob Newall uses 1000rpm less

MASERATI 8CM

Sold/number built 1933-'34/19

Construction channel-section steel chassis, boxed and drilled, aluminium body

Engine dry-sump, dohc 2992cc straight-eight, with two valves per cylinder, magneto ignition, Roots-type supercharger and SU carburettor (originally Weber 55ASI)

Max power 320bhp @ 5500rpm (240bhp in 1932)

Transmission Wilson/ENV preselector (one of 10 specially made), RWD

Suspension solid front, live rear axle; semi-elliptic leaf springs, friction dampers f/r

Steering worm and gear

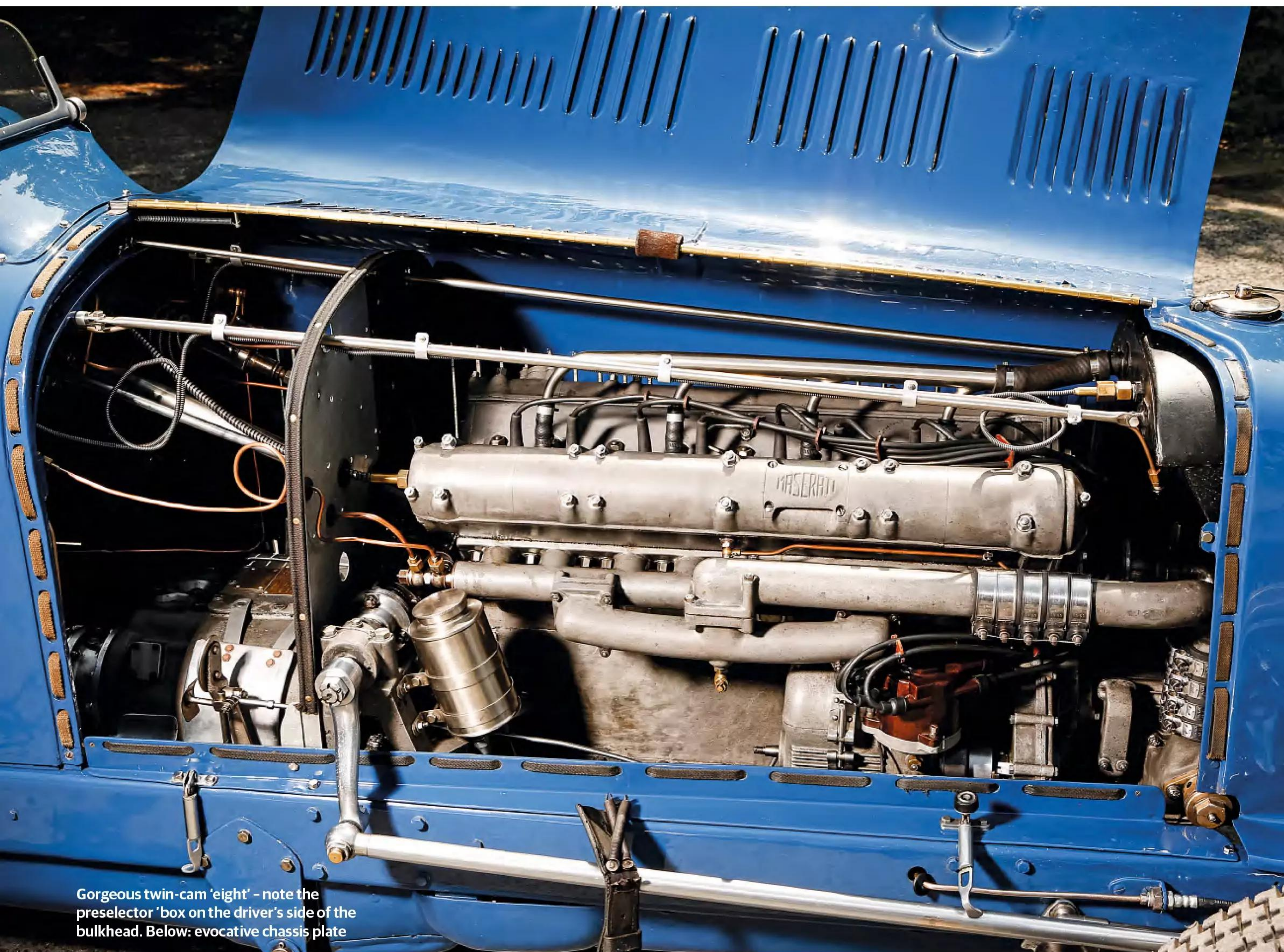
Brakes hydraulic drums

Wheelbase 8ft 5in (2560mm)

Weight 1731lb (785kg)

Top speed 140mph (154mph achieved by Giuseppe Furmanik for flying kilometre)

Price new £2000



Gorgeous twin-cam 'eight' – note the preselector 'box' on the driver's side of the bulkhead. Below: evocative chassis plate



Bira's chances in the '36 Donington Grand Prix were spoilt by a muffed start due to wet plugs, but he stormed back up to fifth after a new set was fitted. Smitten by the 8CM's performance, Bira instructed his team to rebuild 3011 for 1937. Following early success at Brooklands, Bira returned to Ireland for the Cork Grand Prix, where he was lucky to survive a high-speed crash after mounting the kerb and scraping along a wall.

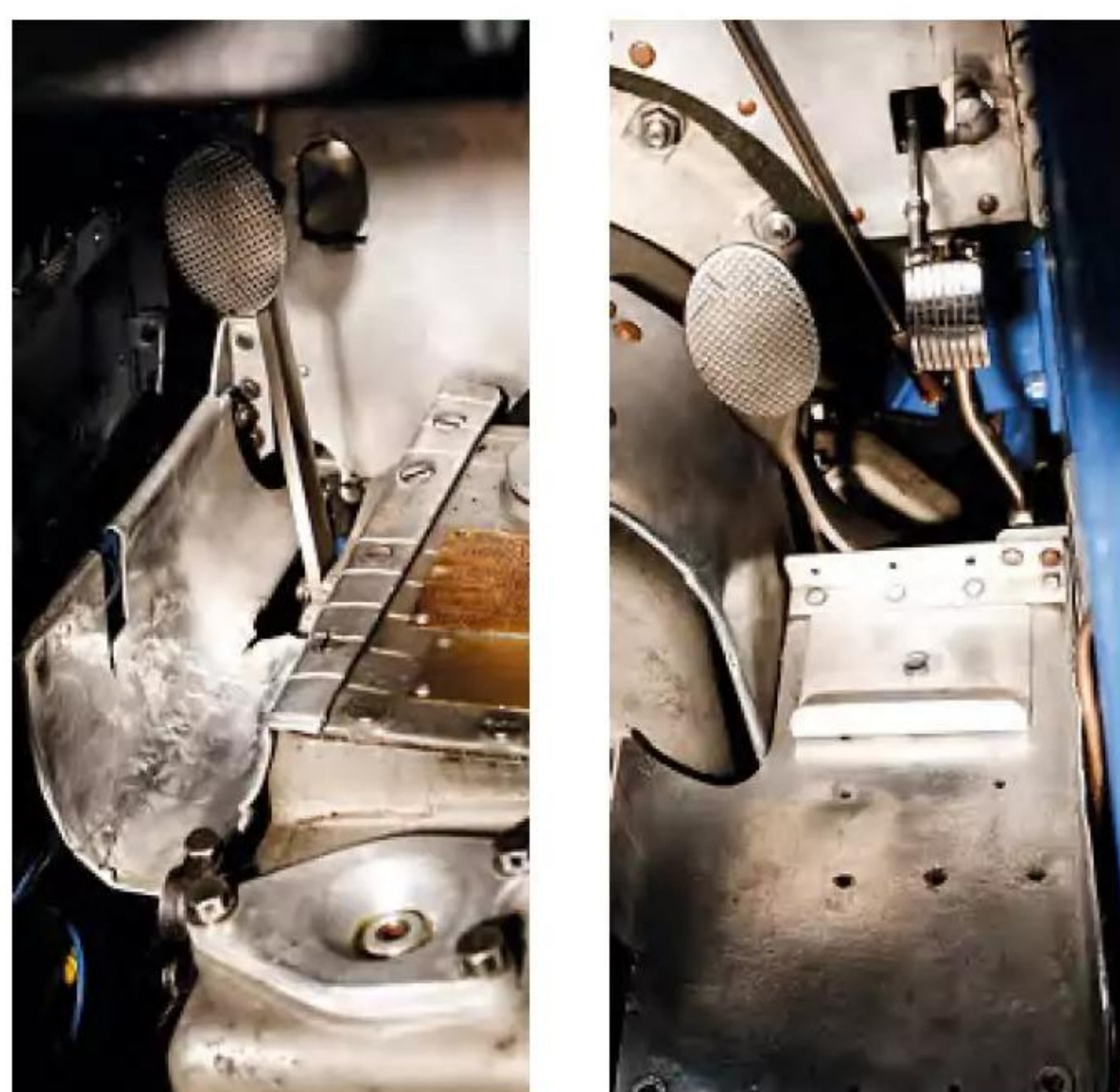
Back in England, chief mechanic 'Lofty' England arranged for the purchase of Straight's 8CM sports car, from which parts were cannibalised for the rebuild. By August, Bira was back at the wheel of the Maserati. Its speed was again underlined on a trip to Ireland, where Bira broke the Phoenix Park lap record at 107.28mph, and he was the first non-German car home at the Donington Grand Prix.

Like many pre-war Grand Prix machines after WW2, the 8CM was restricted to hillclimbs and Formule Libre speed events, with successful builder Kenneth McAlpine eventually buying it from Bira in 1948. Repainted black and later red, 3011 raced

throughout the 1950s, with guest drivers including Tony Gaze, Cliff Davis and Jack Sears. A new life began at Vintage Sports-Car Club meetings in the hands of Nobby Spero and Dan Margulies, both enthusiastic Maserati folk, before it ended up in Lord Doune's Scottish collection for a well-earned rest.

In the 1980s it passed into the hands of David Heimann, who had Ivan Dutton restore it to Straight colours and commissioned Denis Jenkinson, a long-term admirer of 3011, to write a book on the famous Maserati. The engine's lack of reliability frustrated the new team, and against uprated ERAs it never found its previous form. After spending a few years with Peter Giddings in America, this popular machine finally returned to England with Chris Jaques, who coincidentally is related to Prince Chula's wife, Elizabeth 'Lisba' Hunter.

A major rebuild commenced, with Chris enlisting John Moore and Paul Bonewell, both former C&G specialists, to carry it out. The result, finished in the White Mouse team colours from the 1936-'37 seasons, is a tribute to the owner's vision and the workmanship of



Above: gearchange pedal needs a firm push. Right: the preselector quadrant is mounted on the steering column – the pattern takes a little practice to master



Recreating the White Mouse team's Brooklands prep – complete with period-correct umbrella



these gifted engineers. After a meticulous rebuild and the frustrating challenge of rectifying previous mistakes – particularly the crankshaft – 3011 now looks and sounds as good as it did during the 1930s. On the dyno, the engine develops a mighty 320bhp at 5500rpm.

This car has long captivated me. While I was a student in the late 1970s, I hitched all the way up to Scotland to see it resting in Doune Castle, and later I chatted enthusiastically with my hero 'Jenks' after its restoration. When Chris recently agreed to a test run, it was a dream come true to sit where Straight, Seaman and Bira had commanded 3011 to impressive results. Born before independent suspension and streamlining took hold, the upright 8CM has a special aura from an era when engines were still the main focus of performance.

The team goes through a well-rehearsed pre-run routine on 3011, with *le patron* Chris often sitting in the cockpit with his checklist, which was inspired by a pilot friend's pre-flight procedure with a Bücker Jungmeister. With soft plugs and a small amount of fuel for start-up, just to draw through the methanol, the rear

wheels are jacked for a warm-up. A remote battery is plugged in and, with magneto and fuel-pump switches down, the starter button is pressed. The unsilenced straight-eight gruffly erupts before the highly corrosive alcohol is drawn into the supercharger and down the inlet tracts. Once warmed, the engine is switched off and hard plugs are fitted before the restart, which results in a clean, raucous bark, and the exhaust and engine-gear noise are dominated by the blower's whine.

Regular driver Rob Newall does a few laps to check that everything is fine before Jaques generously invites me for a much-anticipated test. Entry via the right side is recommended because it's easy to grasp the hot exhaust without thinking. The rear semi-elliptic spring makes the perfect step before climbing in and slipping beneath the chunky three-spoke steering wheel. On the advice of no less than John Surtees, the seat has

been bolstered to improve the view of the front wheels. In the footwell, your legs are split around the heavy, large preselector casing, with throttle and brake down to the right.

The dashboard is dominated by a bold Jaeger rev counter that's redlined at 6500rpm, but Rob rarely exceeds 5500rpm. Temperature gauges, plus those for oil and fuel pressure, nestle on the cramped dashboard around the steering column. There's a hand fuel pump to the left, but it's rarely needed once the engine is running.

"Make sure you firmly push the selector pedal down all the way," advises Chris as I adjust my goggles. To prevent the engine's vast torque rocking the chassis, it's best to hold the car on the outside brake lever before hitting the starter. Having driven a few preselector racing cars, I had no fears about gearchanges, but the right quadrant here takes more familiarity than expected. Rather than the sequential-type

"In any paddock, it's soon apparent how much enthusiasts love this Maserati"

STRAIGHT'S STORY

As the son of Dorothy Payne Whitney, one of America's wealthiest women, Whitney Willard Straight was never going to be short of money. He was just six when his father died of influenza while serving in WW1; following his mother's remarriage, he moved to England in 1925.

Like many rich youngsters, Straight was attracted to speed. He started competing at Brooklands aged 19, first with a Riley and then the ex-'Tim' Birkin Maserati 26M. He first ran the latter in a Swedish ice race, where he suffered his only sporting injury after hitting a bridge at 120mph. By 1933 he had ventured further afield: results included a second at Albi and fourth in the Italian Grand Prix at Monza.

Before he started racing, the 16-year-old Straight learnt to fly, paying £1 for lessons at Haldon Aerodrome in Devon. Later, as an undergraduate, he regularly flew his Gipsy Moth or Puss Moth from Cambridge to Brooklands to race.

He dropped out in 1934 to concentrate on motor racing after forming Whitney Straight Ltd with Giulio Ramponi. He set



GETTY

an impressive 138.78mph circuit of Brooklands in the borrowed ex-Count Trossi Duesenberg, then second only to John Cobb's Napier-Railton. The season brought mixed fortunes, with the tragic loss of teammate Hugh Hamilton in the Swiss Grand Prix, before Straight retired from racing after victory in South Africa. An engagement to Lady Daphne Finch-Hatton might have influenced his surprise decision, and from 1935 flying became his main focus for pleasure and business.

In the 1930s, as director of the Straight Corporation Ltd, he operated air races, airfields and flying clubs across Britain, later expanding to Western Airways using DH Dragon Rapides, and he helped to develop the Miles M11A private plane. Other interests included photography and playing bass in a jazz band.

During WW2, Straight served with the RAF, first in Norway – earning a Military Cross – and then with 601 Squadron during the Battle of Britain. After being shot down, he made it to Vichy France before being captured and then escaping in 1942 and reaching Gibraltar.

Following hostilities, Straight became a key figure with British European Airways, then BOAC, as well as a board member at Rolls-Royce. He died in 1979, aged 66.

Gurney Nutting increased scuttle height by 2in to accommodate the tall Straight



movement that's such a delight with ERAs and Rileys, this has a trickier action, with two defined ridges between the neutral-to-first and second-to-third changes that initially requires more concentration. If the selector lever isn't correctly slotted, the huge Armstrong below will remain in neutral or the previous gear.

From the off, the engine delivers serious poke, with beefy torque from 1500rpm right through the range. Once into third, you can relax about the gears because the change from third to top and back is direct via a cone clutch.

The acceleration in third is awesome: the surge takes my breath away, and it's easy to see why this 8CM has had such a long competitive life. With just a linen helmet on, the exhaust and shrill supercharger noise must have been deafening after a three-hour race. Initially, the 8CM's character feels accessible, with well-weighted, direct steering and smooth power, but the faster you go the more physical it gets. The storming delivery requires total concentration, and you really have to grip the steering wheel. The brake pedal is weighty and the drums pull the car up strongly, but with such reserves of power they need to.

After a few laps I'm full of admiration for Nuvolari, Straight and Bira, who harnessed 8CMs on rough road courses for hours on end. To prepare for racing 3011, 68-year-old Rob has started working out for the first time in his motorsport career in order to strengthen his upper body, and particularly his grip.

Rob was destined to drive 3011 for Chris. These long-term friends met when racing Jaguar XKs in the 1990s, and they later shared Chris' C-type, including at Goodwood and Le Mans. When he bought the Maserati, Chris, who's since hung up his helmet, felt there was only one person to trust with it. "My father used to compete with his MG at Brooklands and Donington," he says. "When he died, Mum passed on an envelope she found. Inside were four old photographs of a white racing car at Brooklands. On the back, Dad's handwritten notes identified it as Whitney Straight's. It would have been special if he'd seen me race it."

As a Porsche driving instructor, Rob managed to arrange a first test of the newly acquired 8CM at Millbrook. "It was an extraordinary experience," he recalls. "As I held the steering wheel, I couldn't help



thinking about its amazing history and the great drivers who'd sat here. Compared to Chris' Bugatti Type 35, it felt much heavier and more powerful. The acceleration on Millbrook's straight was spectacular, but it felt a very physical machine to handle.

"The preselector is easy, but with such impressive torque you need only third and fourth at Goodwood and Donington. Now the engine is sorted, its speed is amazing. At the Members' Meeting, it was the fastest car through the speed traps on the Lavant Straight and over the startline at 127mph.

"The car likes fast corners and feels very stable, but it's too important to take risks. There's no way we'll catch Calum Lockie's 6CM, but at Goodwood we were really pleased to beat all the ERAs. I held back through the corners because you have to respect the brakes, but once on the power it just picked them off."

Other highlights have included a class win at the Festival of Speed in 2012. "We tried the twin rears for the first time, which didn't make much difference due to the extra weight," Rob continues. "At the prizegiving Lord March said it was the car he most wanted to take home."



Owner Chris Jaques with Paul Bonewell, John Moore and Paul Steed, who are all involved in chassis 3011's care

After several years in America, it's wonderful to see this Maserati back in England with such an enthusiastic owner and support team. "It's such a special car and I love to see it race," says Chris. "But we limit the outings to three or four events a year where it's really appreciated." Stand around 3011 in the paddock and it's soon apparent how much enthusiasts love this beautiful racing car, its presence and glorious sound often refreshing old memories – including those of a former mechanic from the 1950s who turned up to see it at Goodwood.

"It was Bruno Pericardi, who had worked

on 3011 for 'Nobby' Spero," says Chris. "After problems at Silverstone in 1957, he'd borrowed Spero's helmet for a few test laps in practice. When he returned to the paddock, everyone kept telling him to stay in the car until the attention had calmed. It turned out that Bruno had put the car on pole. He had come to Goodwood just to see 3011 for the last time."

There's no doubt that the long list of famous folk involved with 3011's history would approve of the present team's dedication to it. All are volunteers on race days – which says everything about this fabulous machine. 

THE BEAST





OF BOLOGNA

With eight cylinders and twin blowers,
Maserati's 8CTF is a 400bhp torpedo
and one of the quickest pre-war racers

WORDS MICK WALSH PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER

If the bonnet looks long from the outside, then the view from the driving seat is majestic. It stretches out like a fat torpedo and adds to the sensation of riding a mighty missile, perched high in the cramped cockpit. From behind the broad, three-spoke wheel, those 19in Dunlop racing tyres look a long way off and unbelievably skinny for an 864kg projectile with a sliver under 400bhp and instant, rubber-burning torque. I'm in awe of the car and its drivers long before stepping up into the cramped cockpit. With legs straddling the truck-sized gearbox casing, clutch to the left, and centre throttle and brake to the right, the mighty 8CTF floods the imagination.

The combination of my apprehensive excitement and flashes of spectacular history is intoxicating. Gazing over the minimal aeroscreen, with cord-bound wheel inches from the chest and snake-like fuel line running close to your left thigh, it's easy to slip back to the baking heat of Tripoli. With only a linen helmet for protection, the high sun is glinting off the Mercedes-Benz W154 ahead on the grid and this very machine is making its debut with the sinister-looking Achille Varzi at the wheel.

The instruments are minimal. Who'd want too many distractions from the main task of keeping this beast on the blacktop? A Jaeger rev counter dominates, with back-up SACMA gauges for temperature plus oil and fuel pressures. Start-up is relatively simple and, thanks to an onboard starter, doesn't require outside assistance once you know the routine. Fuel tap on, a splash of Ki-gas for those long inlet tracts from the blowers on the nose of the big motor, prime the fuel pressure, ignition on, hold the oil-pressure cut-off switch up and press the starter. After a few churns, this titan wakes through its deep-throated, metallic exhaust. Catch the revs with a little throttle and the note changes to an awesome fiery clamour, a unique *basso* roar. With two exhausts, one playing from each block of four cylinders, the note, underscored by blower whine, reaches noise levels equal to paired racers warming up. Just sitting there with its deafening blat cutting the cold morning air, I'm whisked back to the brick-lined start at Indy, looking for a way through the multi-coloured local Specials in front of the high, packed grandstands.

Suddenly the focus is back to the moment, the oil temperature is up and we're off. My apprehension of the beast is lessened with its smooth, light steering and light racing clutch. The engine, too, is marvellously tractable and, with huge reserves of low down torque, it pulls cleanly from early revs. Even in top it will respond better than most machines through the gears. The crooked gearchange, under the steering column, has a meaty, deep action, but the H-gate is clean and precise.

The Maserati's first exercise is on a tight handling course and, although it doesn't protest, the nose ploughs out into the tight turns and with over-cautious throttle use just understeers more. Sampling a hydroplane on a boating lake or the Flying Scotsman on a local branch line would be comparable, but finally we can let loose on a long straight. Now, letting the revs stretch to 4500rpm in each gear, the performance is staggering. In the lower gears the rear rubber lights up with a fraction of

throttle, and even in third and top it still breaks traction. But balance the power with the limited grip and the slingshot push is awesome. With that ferocious exhaust bellowing to your right, the thrust is not neck-snapping, more like a high-dive fall. Its breathtaking gallop feels effortless compared to post-war screamers. The power just keeps pouring out, even in its tall top gear from Indy, and after letting off at 5000rpm, I later learn we were running at 140mph. At that speed you feel alarmingly vulnerable with such tiptoe rubber contact.

Two days later, my left ear is still ringing and my memory feverish from the experience. I can't imagine how Mercedes made use of extra power or how you tamed such grunt in the wet, but the car control of the front-running pre-war aces was divine. It's one thing balancing under power on smooth, modern track surfaces, but on broken roads with exposed draincovers at Leghorn or sandswept turns at Tripoli it takes a special kind of hero.

The 8CTF's specification on paper looked no match for the exotic V12s of Mercedes-Benz and Auto Union. Neubauer, Uhlenhaut and Professor Porsche might have dismissed the long-stroke 350bhp straight-eight and dated

live rear axle design. Even the team's drivers were looking old, Varzi's edge sapped by drug addiction and poor health, Count 'Didi' Trossi's physique broken by cancer. But the Mercedes (Auto Union wasn't yet ready) were in for a surprise when the new Maseratis arrived in North Africa aboard stylish fresh Fiat transporters for the '38 Tripoli GP. Trossi's best in practice was good enough for the second row but 13 secs down on Lang's W154 on pole, yet in the race the strongly pro-Italian crowd was electrified as the big red Maserati, with the Alfa Romeo 312s of Farina and Siena, held on to the leading Mercs. Both the Alfas were involved in serious accidents, costing Siena his life. Ahead of all this tragedy Trossi, keeping the hammer down, momentarily caught leader Lang on lap nine before the gearbox cried enough.

Voiturette production was a priority at Pontevicchio, so the 8CTF had to wait two months for a second sortie, by which time the grille had been deepened to improve cooling. Trossi raised Italian hopes by putting the 8CTF on pole at the Coppa Ciano at Leghorn and valiantly led the Mercs of Caracciola and Lang for four laps before the brakes faded and then the engine let go. A week later, Trossi was at it





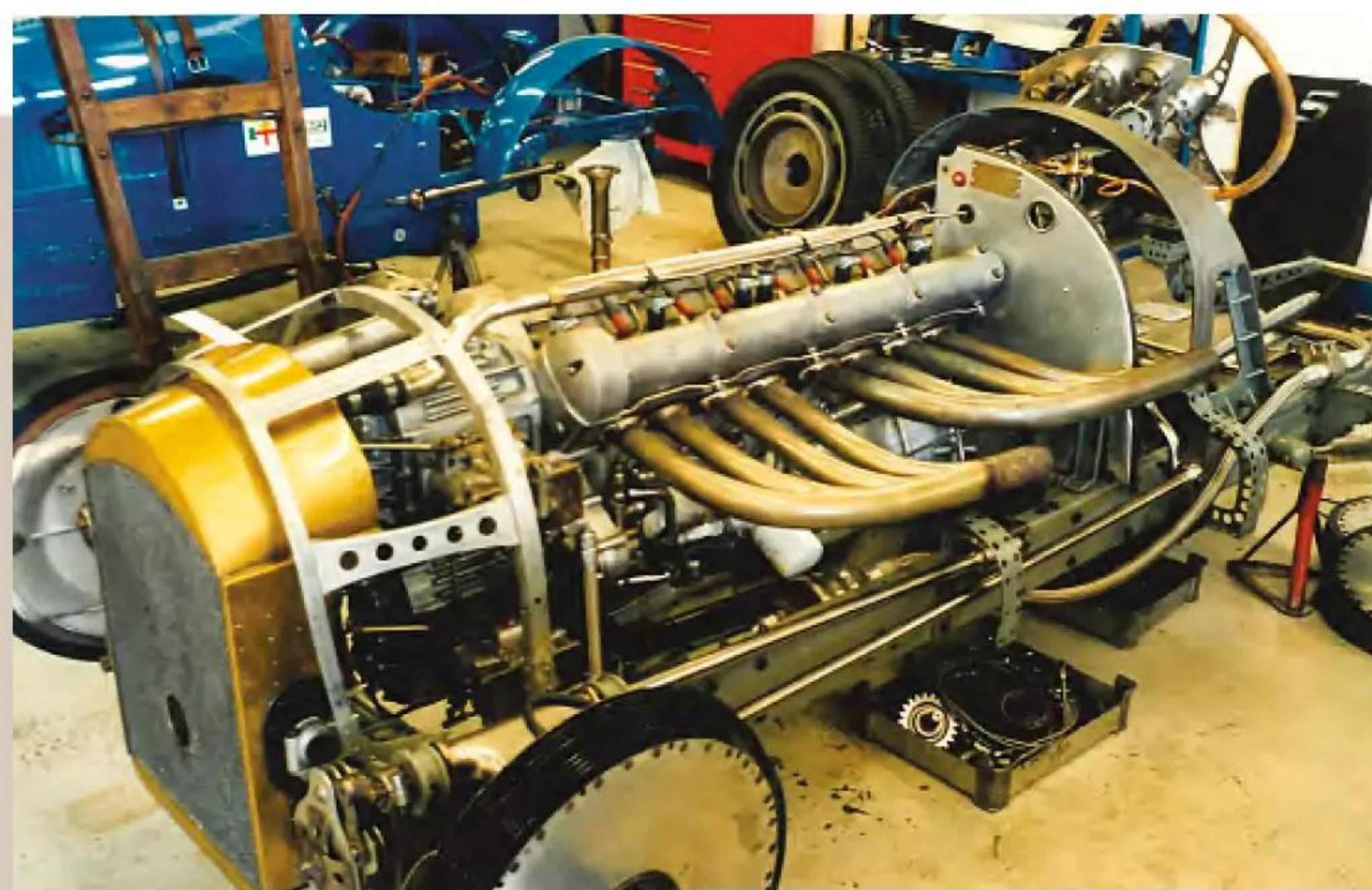
The 8CTF's natural understeer gave the perfect balance for Indy's banked turns. Below right: pedals straddle the gearbox, with centre throttle to the right

SPECIALIST'S VIEW: TIM DUTTON

As the son of respected Bugatti restorer Ivan and now running the family company, Tim Dutton has worked on most of the greatest cars from Molsheim. A racer at heart and an avid fan of American sprint cars, Tim relished the challenge of sorting the 8CTF for owner Dean Butler.

"The monobloc design denotes its designation '8 Corsa Testa Fissa' and avoids gaskets, which is a good thing with blown engines," says Tim. "In the '30s, engineers didn't understand torsional vibrations and harmonics, which is a problem with an engine as long as the 8CTF's. Vittorio Jano used a central gear tower at Alfa, but with the Maserati's long cams, the timing can be out by the time you get to the back of the engine, due to twist." Prior to Tim's involvement with the 8CTF the engine wouldn't run cleanly below 4000rpm. Drastic measures included a short axle ratio and revised firing order, but when Tim stripped the Memini twin-choke carburetors he discovered missing jets.

With complete carbs and enlarged fuel lines (one gallon a minute at 150mph), the engine's response is sensational. On the dyno it recorded 390bhp at 5400rpm, but more importantly 320lb ft at 2500rpm, peaking at 360lb ft at 4200rpm, for an



almost flat torque curve. Tim then set about returning the car to Maserati's specification: "Mercedes is lucky: the original tuning data has been handed down, which is why its cars always run so well. But with Maserati there are no records. The four-speed gearbox has a rudimentary dog engagement, which was an improvement over the earlier 8CM if still fairly agricultural, but the gears had to be strong to take the torque. The weak point of the driveline is the drop gears to the crownwheel and pinion."

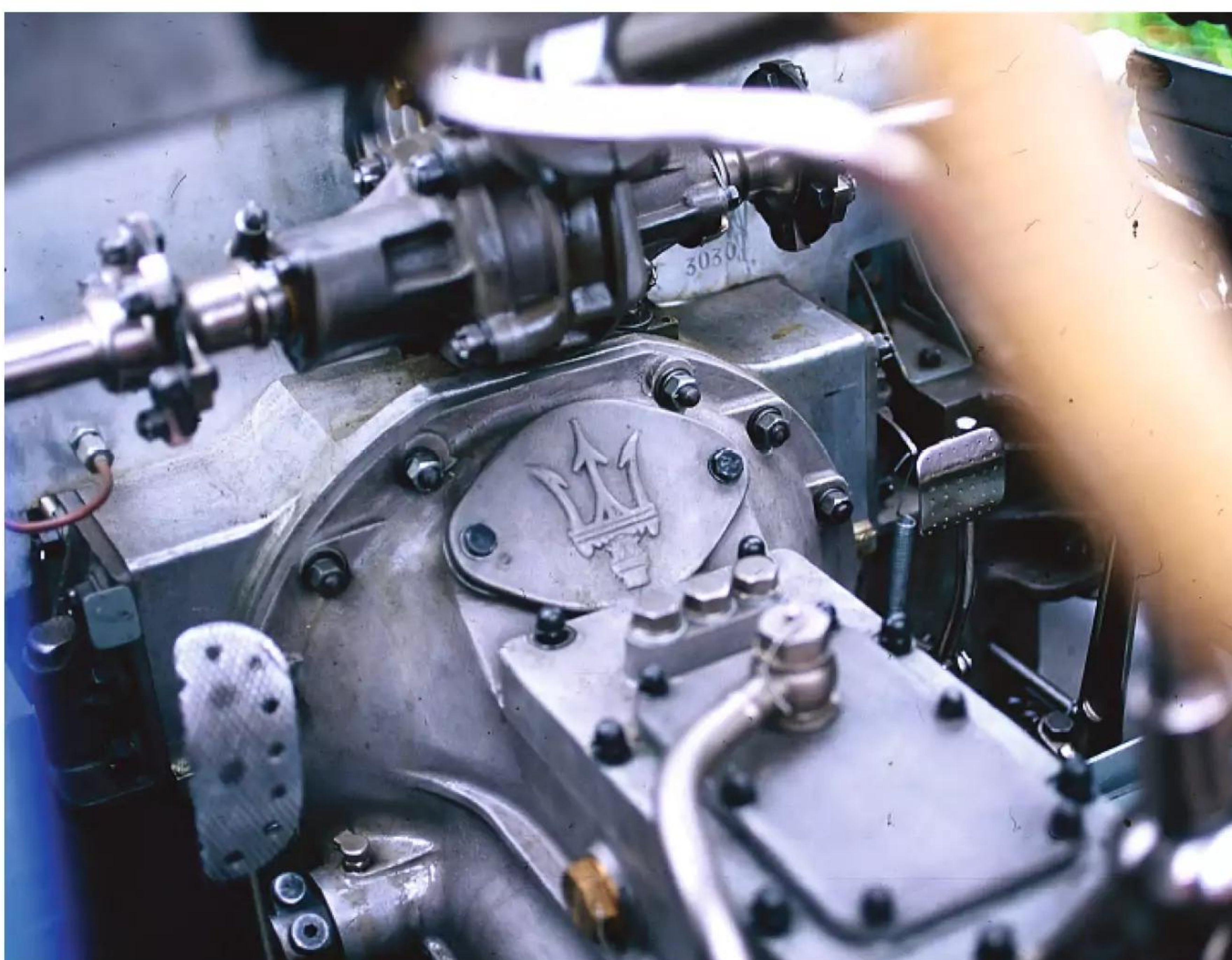
The chassis is basically an enlarged Tipo 4CM *voiturette* with a box-section frame, independent front suspension by longitudinal torsion bars and quarter-elliptics at the rear. A novelty of the chassis is a massive magnesium X-brace section under the seat, where it also doubles as an oil tank.

"All its stiffness is in the back end," Tim adds. "To avoid any crankcase distortion the 8CTF's engine has only three mounts: two solid ones at the back around the steering and one at the front, where it works like a Rose joint. As a result the nose of the chassis turns into one big, undamped spring. Again, at Indy it wasn't a problem because it didn't have to handle or stop."

Tim would like this famous old racer go back to as close to its original specification as possible. The beautiful sand-cast exhaust manifolds are his recent work. He says: "The baselines in vintage racing have moved on, and everything is under pressure to beat cars they wouldn't normally compete against. The 8CTF should go back to its magnesium brake drums and run a petrol mix. Everything Maserati about this car is fabulous and shouldn't be changed to go more quickly."

again, this time upstaging the returning Auto Union team as well. Having started from the back of the grid, the Maserati was leading by lap nine, but the pitiless heat was too much for Trossi and, after an off-course excursion, he gave his car over to Grand Prix debutant Luigi Villorresi. The young gun's pace was blistering and, before he handed the car back to a revived Trossi, he set fastest lap. Another failed engine ended the day with retirement.

Maserati's new financier, Count Adolfo Orsi, was motivated by the 8CTF's promise and demanded an all-out effort for Monza. Three cars were entered for Trossi, Villorresi and Goffredo Zehender. Team tactics were to conserve the cars and make it to the finish, but it proved to be another anticlimax. Zehender crashed, Villorresi's engine blew and Trossi, who had worked his way up to third at half distance, suffered ignition problems and was disqualified from a final fifth after outside assistance on the circuit. The 1938 season ended at Donington with a single 8CTF for Villorresi, but the transporter arrived late and, after a shortened practice, 'Gigi' blasted through from 14th to sixth before over-revving the engine, blaming unsuitable gearing.





THE RACER'S VIEW MARTIN WALFORD

Monza, Monaco, Donington, Nürburgring and Goodwood: historic racer Martin Walford has been lucky enough – and brave enough – to experience the 8CTF in the heat of the pack at all these legendary tracks. His dream is to run at Pike's Peak and follow in the tracks of Louis Unser, who won up the famous five-mile Mt Equinox course in the Italian rocket.

"It's my favourite of the cars I've been lucky to drive," says Martin. "Just starting up in the paddock it pulls the crowds. Its charisma is unrivalled.

"With such huge reserves of power, wheelspin is a problem in every gear, and regularly out of corners such as Becketts I'm checking the rear tyres for smoke. Even in top the revs will rise and there's no increase in acceleration: it just spins the power away. Unlike the ERA, it demands a more modern, smooth driving style. Into corners it will understeer, and it continues to push out if you're too gentle with the throttle. But too much right foot and it bites back quickly. You really have to feel what the car is trying to do, but get the balance right and dial out the understeer with power, and it's very progressive.

"The understeer is particularly evident in the wet. The steering is smooth, light and responsive. When it's jacked up you can turn the wheel with your little finger. At the apex the chassis twist and the oscillating inside front wheel turns it a little notchy, but in a fast bend it's ideal to balance the car. Because I'm 5ft 6in the cockpit suits me perfectly, but taller drivers would feel cramped.

"Although the car takes all of your concentration, it's important to feel natural and relaxed. Grip the wheel too tightly and you miss too much."

In September 1999 at Goodwood, Martin was totally unfazed by a calculated 174mph on the Lavant straight. He says: "The car felt very stable, but hit a bump and you can feel the chassis whip. The only way to end the patter is to gently trail the throttle and hope it stops." Not surprisingly, Martin feels that the brakes are the car's Achilles' heel: "The new iron drums work up to a point, but they soon fade and cool down slowly. The increased unsprung weight is part of the problem, with front-wheel oscillation in the middle of corners, but the restored original magnesium drums should change that. Best of all is the acceleration, which is shattering using 6000rpm in second and third. I'd love to have a straight fight with a Mercedes-Benz at Donington."



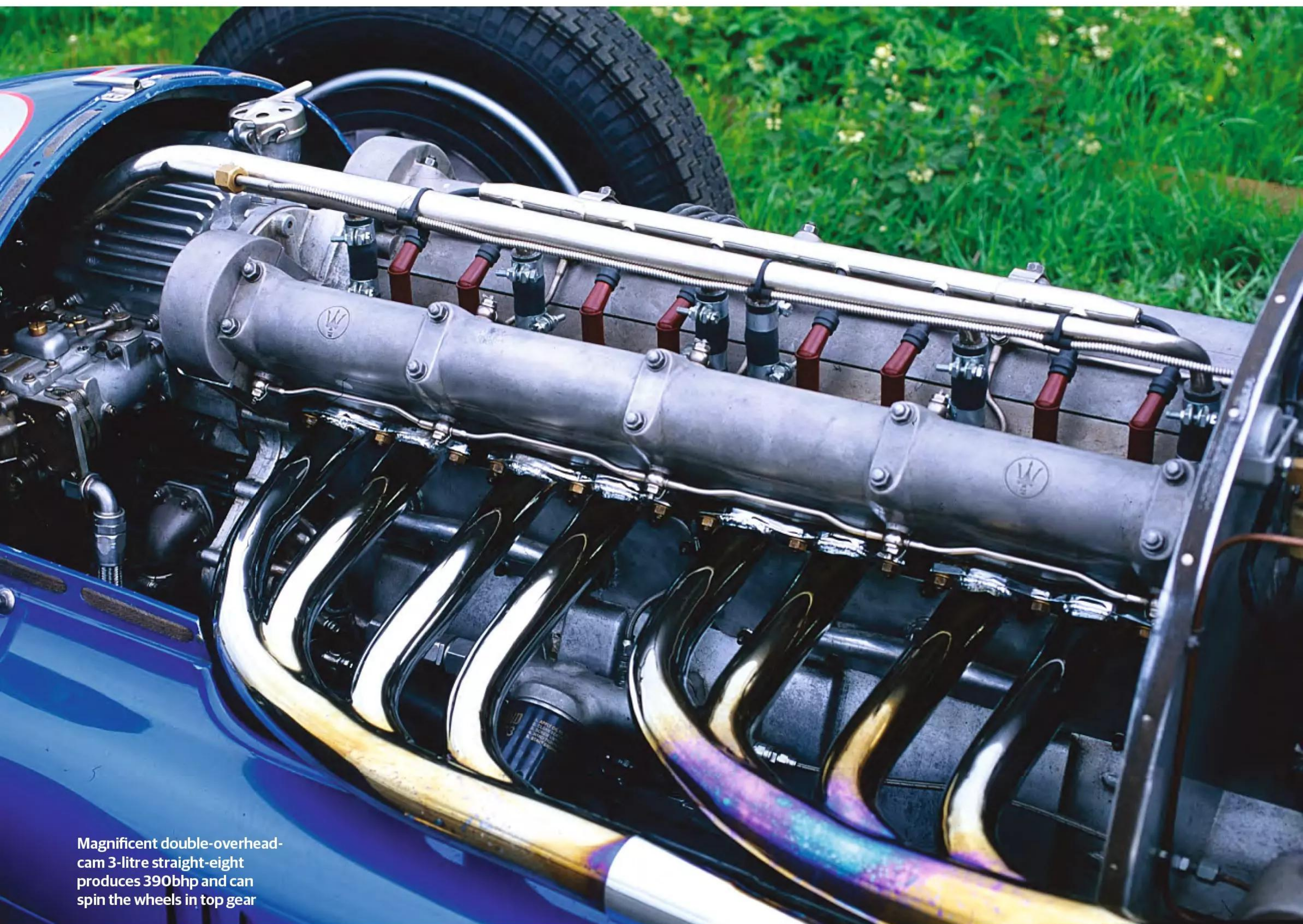
Spokes of cord-wrapped wheel echo lines of offset dash. From below: maker's plaque; drum brakes are prone to fade after reining in straight-eight's excesses



Despite dismal results, Maserati continued the 8CTF's development for the 1939 season. Power was raised to 365bhp at 6400rpm and the body was cleaned up with a new broad base from nose to tail that would become a classic Maserati style. A turnaround in fortune for this under-funded team came from America. The organisers of the Indianapolis 500, in the hope of making the event more international, had adopted Europe's Grand Prix formula, which opened the gate for obsolete Alfa P3s.

In 1938, Chicago-based entrant Mike Boyle optimistically entered a *voiturette* Maserati 6CM for Mauri Rose, and the little car surprised all by running fifth before the supercharger blew at 165 laps. Boyle, impressed by how the 91cu in engine held up against the big-bore Millers and Offys, ordered 'The Big One', and Zehender's old-style, single-exhaust-pipe car (chassis 3032) from Monza was refreshed and went west. During its winter Atlantic crossing both cylinder blocks cracked and new ones had to be sent. Boyle's team detuned the engine to 350bhp but ran on 80% methanol fuel, which cooled the engine but increased consumption.

Christened the Boyle Special and entered for 1937 Indy winner Wilbur Shaw, the Maserati



Magnificent double-overhead-cam 3-litre straight-eight produces 390bhp and can spin the wheels in top gear

whipped all the local Specials. Although not as quick at the top end as the centrifugally blown Sparks 'six', it scored with its smooth torque out of the banked turns and longer-lasting tyres due to its superior chassis. Shaw scored the first win at Indy for a European marque since Howdy Wilcox's Peugeot back in 1916.

The glorious May victory boosted spirits back in Bologna, and the two remaining 8CTFs were readied for the German Grand Prix for Villoresi and the former Auto Union ace Paul Pietsch. Few knew the demanding Nürburgring as well as the Black Forest-born Pietsch, and in treacherous mixed weather conditions, his performance was sensational. Although down on the third row at the start, the big Maser was leading by lap two, much to the horror of the packed German crowd, but the Italian-made spark plugs couldn't take the heat and Pietsch lost more than six minutes in four pitstops. But the German fought back and, despite suffering a big spin trying to take third place from Brendel's Mercedes, Pietsch finished a magnificent third behind Caracciola and Miller. Had the Maserati been allowed Bosch spark plugs (teams were required to use plugs and tyres made in their home nation) and

Pietsch not spun, victory could have been red.

The bittersweet German Grand Prix was the final works outing for the 8CTF, and Orsi surprisingly sold the remaining cars (3030 and 3031) to French entrant Laury Schell, who, together with his American wife Lucy O'Reilly, ran Ecurie Lucy O'Reilly-Schell. Both 8CTFs were painted blue and entered for the Swiss GP at Bremgarten for René Dreyfus and 'Raph'. Neither driver was the match of Pietsch and only Dreyfus finished, down in a lowly eighth place. Two months later Schell was killed in a road accident and, with France and Britain rebuffing Hitler's peace offer, O'Reilly returned to America. How her two 8CTFs were spirited across the Atlantic for the 1940 Indianapolis was an impressive achievement during such troubled times. Here, the Boyle-prepared 8CTF repeated its success by scoring a second '500' win with Wilbur Shaw. O'Reilly entered both her cars for Dreyfus and René LeBeque (the two French aces had escaped wartorn Europe for America), but only LeBeque qualified and the best the blue Maser could make was 10th with both drivers sharing.

After Indy, O'Reilly sold the two Maseratis to Lou Moore, and, with Elgin Piston Pin

sponsorship, the cars were properly prepared for the 1941 Indy 500. With longer gearing, Rose put 3031 on pole with a 128.69mph lap, but he retired with ignition trouble while Duke Nalon struggled home to 15th in chassis 3030. The big straight-eight Maseratis continued to run at Indianapolis as late as 1951. The car featured here, 3030, finished an impressive fourth in 1946 for Emil Andrews, while 3031 won Pike's Peak hillclimb in 1946 and '47.

The Boyle Special, 3032, now sits proudly in the Indy Museum, but the other two have been returned to racing. The great Maserati enthusiast Cameron Millar returned 3031 to Europe in 1970 and restored it to historic competition before Joel Finn bought it. American connoisseur Bob Rubin saved 3030 and had it restored by Chris Leydon and dressed in Ecurie Bleu colours. Later Dean Butler acquired this fantastic machine and has treated historic racing fans to its awesome noise and staggering performance at special events. With an Auto Union now in private hands, the day may yet come when we see an authentic grid of titans. 'The Big One' from Bologna is set to cause trouble for the Silver Arrows all over again.

THE TRIDENT'S GREATEST RACERS

The ultimate group test, with
sensational 250F, 6CM and 4CLT

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**





MASERATI 250F

Produced/number built 1954-'57/34

Construction steel tubular spaceframe chassis, aluminium body

Engine all-alloy, dry-sump, dohc, 12v 2493cc straight-six, twin-plug head, twin magnetos and triple Weber 42 DCO3 carburettors

Max power 240-270bhp @ 8000rpm

Transmission four/five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs **rear** de Dion axle, transverse leaf spring; Houdaille lever-arm dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering worm and sector **Brakes** drums

Length 13ft 3½in (4050mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2½in (2500mm)

Weight 1388lb (630kg, lightweight)

Top speed 180mph

250F

6CM





MASERATI 6CM

Produced/number built 1936-'39/28

Construction steel box-section chassis, aluminium body

Engine iron-block, magnesium-ump, dohc, 12v 1493cc straight-six, with Roots-type supercharger and Weber 55AS1 carburettor

Max power 175-200bhp @ 6000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual or Wilson preselector, RWD

Suspension: front torsion bars

rear live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; Siata friction dampers f/r

Steering worm and sector

Brakes hydraulic drums

Length 12ft 2½in (3721mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2in (2490mm)

Weight 1433lb (650kg)

Top speed 143mph

MASERATI 4CLT

Produced/number built 1948-'50/18

Construction steel tubular frame,
aluminium body

Engine alloy head and block with steel dry
liners, dohc, 16v 1491cc 'four', with two-
stage Roots-type supercharger and
Weber 50DCO carburettor

Max power 245-260bhp @ 7000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front double wishbones,
coil springs, Houdaille lever-arm dampers

rear live axle, coil springs, Luvax lever-arm
dampers; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering worm and sector

Brakes hydraulic drums

Length 12ft 7½in (3850mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2½in (2500mm)

Weight 1388lb (630kg)

Top speed 168mph



4CIT



A clear, private track, three magnificent Maserati single-seaters with just enough methanol, and instructions to drive them until they run dry: life doesn't get any better than this. Regrettably, this spectacular group is bound for static display with an overseas investor, but who could resist this dream opportunity for a last blast?

From the wild 6CM *voiturette* to the iconic Grand Prix 250F, this series raced all over Europe with works and privateer aces. Could they feel linked by more than the illustrious Trident badge and *rosso* paint, despite spanning some 20 years and several different designers, from Ernesto Maserati to Giulio Alfieri?

After fruitless attempts to challenge the Nazi-backed Silver Arrows in Grand Prix racing, Maserati focused on the *voiturette* formula in the late '30s. As *Il Duce* proclaimed a new Italian Empire and his Abyssinian exploits crippled Italian industry, Ernesto set his mind on a new 1500cc six-cylinder *monoposto* to usurp Raymond Mays' ERAs and tempt wealthy drivers in those tough times.

As someone who will happily spend hours poring over pre-war pictures of the factory-fresh Bologna beauties – and who delights at watching 6CMs well driven by the likes of Stefan Schollwoeck, blasting through fast corners – the earliest car in this amazing group is the one I most crave. At the heart of the 1936 design was a twin-cam 'six' with a gear-train-driven two valves per cylinder. A Roots-type supercharger fed by a Weber carburettor boosted power to 155bhp at 6000rpm, but later fine tuning and bigger carbs pushed it to 175bhp. The motor is set well forward in the hefty C-section chassis, and although Maserati stuck with a trusty leaf-sprung live axle at the rear, the front used a sophisticated independent layout carried over from the unsuccessful Tipo V8 RI. Links with aviation manufacturer Isotta Fraschini went a long way back: all of the Maserati brothers did their engineering apprenticeships with the Milanese giant, and undercarriage development aided the 6CM's wishbone forgings. Like the late-series 4CM, the slim, streamlined Miller-esque bodywork with 'fencer's mask' grille and stubby tail gave the new model an aggressive stance and made the ERAs look very perpendicular.

The increasing prominence of the *voiturette* class – the pre-war equivalent of Formula Two – led to the '36 season kicking off with a support race at the Monaco GP. Gino Rovere gave the works 6CM its debut against a pack of ERAs, but engine problems forced its retirement. Two weeks later the new car came good at the Nürburgring, when Carlo Trossi headed an Italian one-two. A second win over the ERAs in the final at Picardy and a home victory in Milan no doubt boosted interest in the new car, and welcome orders started to come in from wealthy amateurs, such as Brits Arthur Dodson, Earl Howe and Peter Wakefield. To maintain the 6CM's glorious early form, various modifications, including a wider rear track and an unsuccessful four-valve head, were tried to keep pace with the new Alfa Romeo Alfetta.

Pre-war *voiturettes* such as the ERA and the Maserati are hugely charismatic. Both are

beautifully engineered and seriously fast, as they continually prove by beating much younger machines in historics. The car featured here has been extensively campaigned by various passionate Maserati enthusiasts, motivated by the challenge of vanquishing those Bourne racers like the works team did in its heyday. Built early in the series of 28 6CMs, chassis 1543 was raced by Italians Aldo Marazza and Ettore Bianco, but at some point it was dismantled after a crash. In the early '80s, Vintage Sports-Car Club stalwart Bill Summers instigated its rebuild with the help of marque guru Sean Danaher. "He wanted to build an ERA-beater, so we bored and stroked the engine to 2 litres," he recalls. "The gearbox was missing so we fitted a Wilson preselector. The engine developed about 260bhp and the car was very fast. In early testing we were matching

'In fast corners the 6CM really excels, but at the limit it's on a knife-edge'

[ERA] Remus' lap times, and on Silverstone's old Hangar Straight it would pull 140mph at 7000rpm with power still coming. Frustratingly, we couldn't match that form when racing."

Later owned by Robin Lodge, the car was returned to 1500cc spec for Historic Grand Prix Cars Association eligibility, and it mixed it with ERAs at European events. The original Fiat-based gearbox is a known weakness, but with chassis 1543's preselector it isn't a worry. Sitting high in a well-padded seat with low-cut sides, I feel exposed, but I'm more concerned with the start-up. All three have to be towed, but the 6CM with its Wilson 'box is the most daunting.

Rolling off, you watch for the oil pressure needle to prick up while pumping fuel pressure from the tank behind. With gear quadrant in second, the mags are switched on and the left pedal pushed, the engine popping and banging before it eventually fires. To avoid hitting the tow car, it's essential to select neutral and punch the clutch again as well as keeping the revs up and heeling the brake. Once it warms, this little 'six' produces a rorty, vigorous exhaust note and, thanks to its torque, storms eagerly away. A slight shimmy from the front wheels clears as the 6CM picks up speed, and its dynamic charm instantly enthralls.

The steering is exquisite, the short column working paired steering rods to each wheel from the Fiat worm-and-sector box behind the engine. The action is light and superbly responsive as the car powers briskly through the corners. And, thanks to the preselector, you can keep both hands on the wheel through the apex and really get to grips with the neutral chassis. Following the tip of gentle brake pressure until the linings bite, the 6CM pulls up straight and strong when you push harder. Thanks to the advanced front suspension, the sharp end feels superbly sorted, with none of the braking drama of a beam-axle racer.

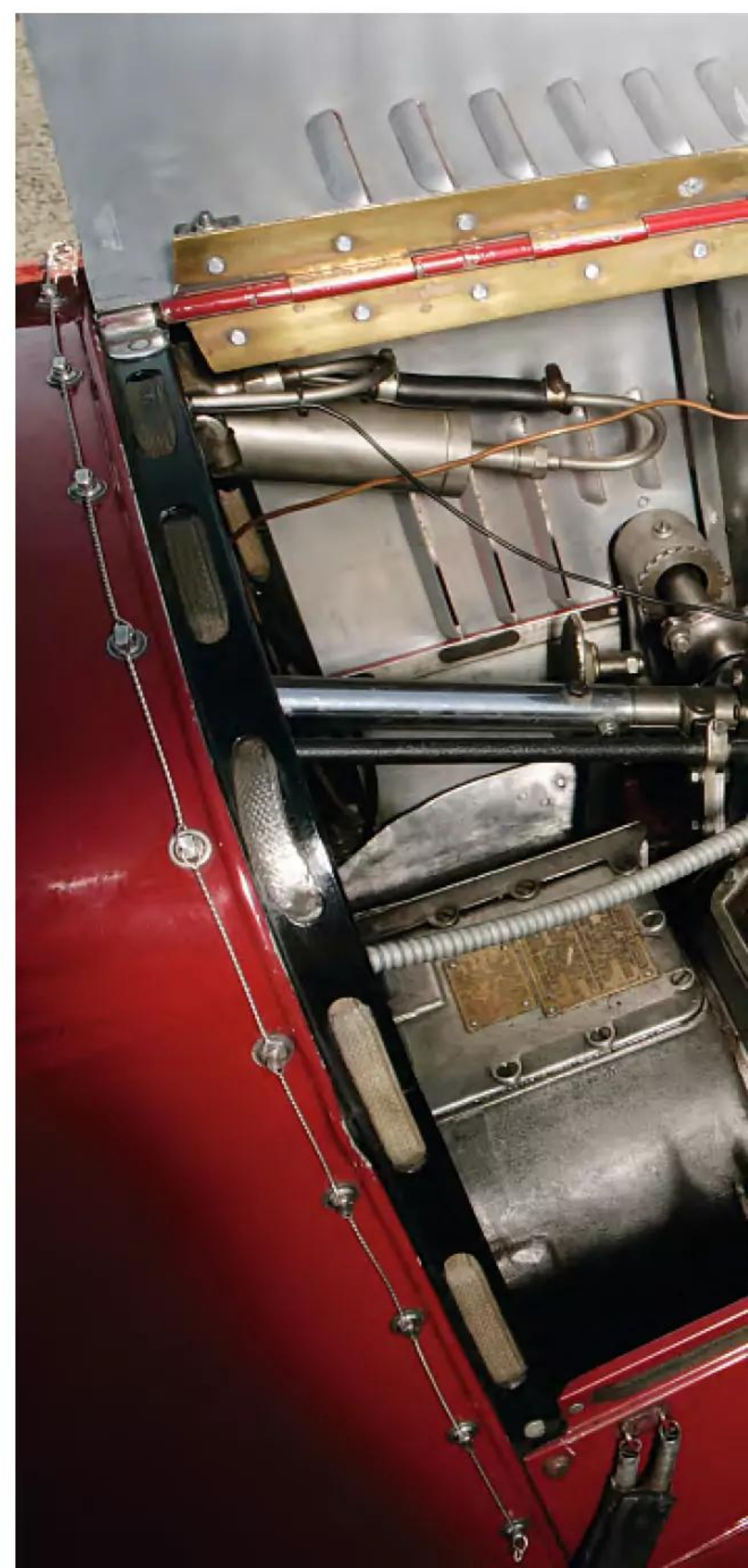
Gunning with confidence around the clear track and relishing the engine's sharp grunt, the firm ride and that sweet straight-six roar, I am totally entranced by the 6CM. Working

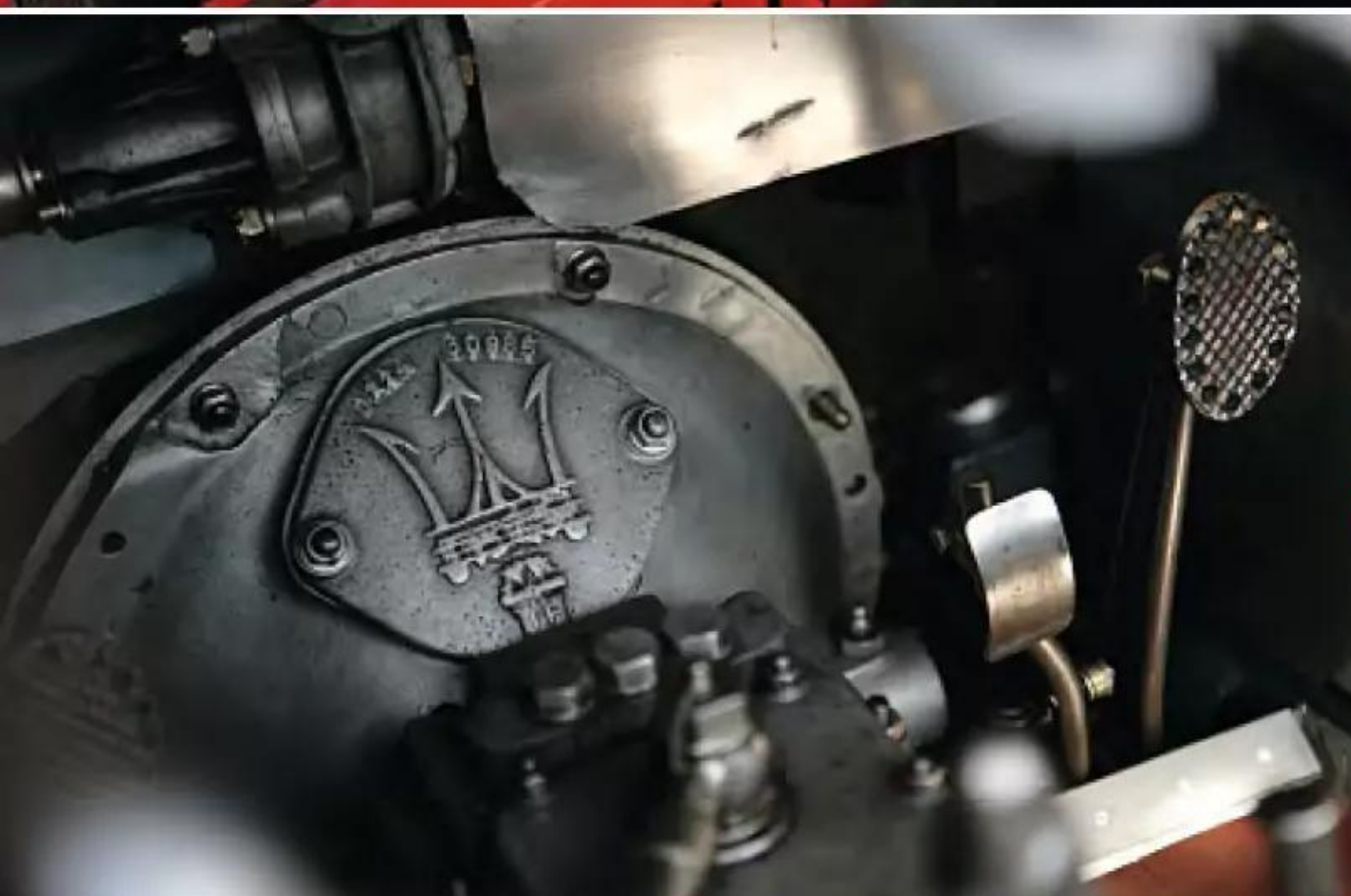
those beautifully engineered components, soaking up the fumes and feeling the engine's heat vividly conjures the lucky life of a wealthy *voiturette* driver in the late 1930s, travelling to exotic road circuits such as Montenero and Pescara. If you couldn't afford a full-house Grand Prix machine, this would have been a fabulous alternative.

Regular 6CM drivers report that the model is beautifully balanced. Enter a corner too fast and it understeers, but if you're less aggressive it repays you with a neutral line. In fast corners the 6CM really excels, but at the limit it's on a knife-edge. "There's a very small drift angle," says Sean. "Pass 20° and there's no chance of catching it when it goes. The ERA is certainly more progressive, but later 6CMs with splayed quarter-elliptics were less nervous. In the right hands it'll match a 250F through a fast corner and only lose out on the straight. Maserati understood independent front suspension better than anyone up to Colin Chapman.

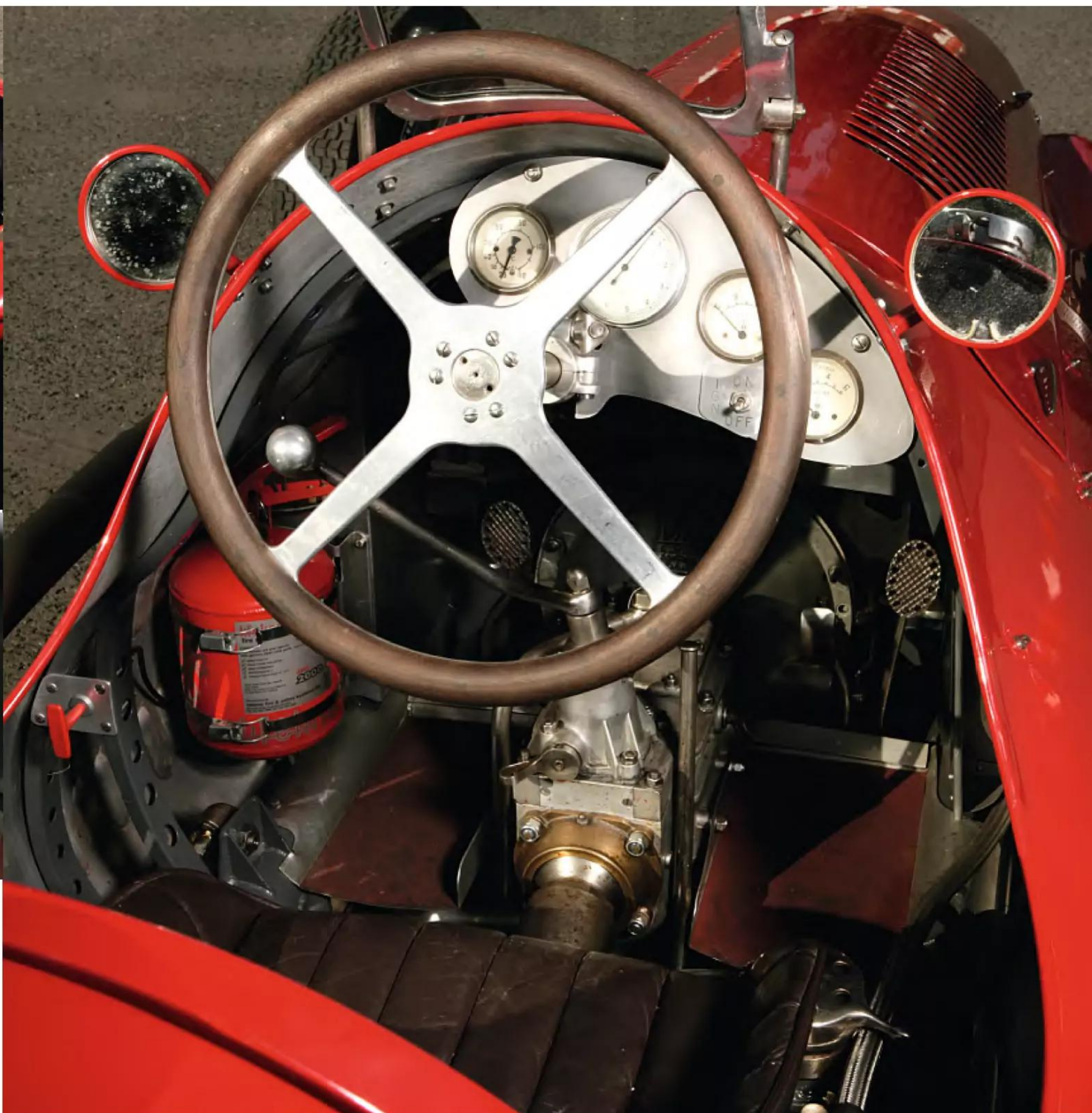
"The blower runs at less pressure than an ERA – 16lb rather than 20lb – and we're using the same cam profile and valve sizes as the factory did. We're getting 185bhp at 6500rpm with a good spread of power: it's all about painstaking dyno development and file work. These early Maseratis are beautifully made and are all hand-finished. Manpower was cheap before WW2, and the 250F doesn't have the same crafted character."

Prior to the arrival of the 4CLT, Maserati's post-war GP challenger, there were some major company changes. Adolfo Orsi took control in 1937, and the Maserati brothers – Ernesto, Bindo and Ettore – had worked out their 10-year design contracts and set up Osca. The factory also moved from the cramped old premises in





Clockwise from top left: 4CLT's complex two-stage supercharged, 16-valve engine proved problematic and was a nightmare to maintain; wide steering wheel, offset dashboard and crooked gearlever to the left behind; traditional centre throttle



Clockwise from left: long bonnet gives good access to 6CM's 1500cc twin-cam; gorgeous steering wheel with preselector quadrant on right; streamlined cowl and advanced independent front suspension

Bologna to Viale Ciro Menotti in Modena. Former Alfa/Scuderia Ferrari man Ing Alberto Massimino was chief engineer, and while old 4CLs and 6CMs dominated when racing restarted in 1946 and '47, he began developing a new single-seater. The pressure was on to produce a design closer to the exotic trends set by the German teams, with tubular chassis, multi-valve heads and two-stage superchargers.

Finally, the old channel-type chassis was replaced with a new *tubolare* design, with round-tube main longerons. At the front, upper wishbones now compressed coil springs concealed inside the bodywork, while the rear still looked dated with a live axle and splayed-out quarter-elliptics like the old 4CL.

The new four-cylinder engine featured two compressors, the lower one driven off the crankshaft while the smaller-bore, upper-stage unit was powered by the camshaft gears. The engine redesign included a rugged new crank, H-section conrods, a strengthened crankcase, new pistons and a revised sump. The square 78mm dimensions gave 1491cc and, running on a methyl alcohol/benzol/acetone brew, the exotic 'four' gave 260bhp at 7000rpm.

With sleek, pencil-style body by Fantuzzi, the 4CLT was successful until the new V12 Ferraris came on song. The new Maserati was victorious first time out for Alberto Ascari and Luigi Villorosi in the '48 San Remo Grand Prix under the quasi-works Scuderia Ambrosiana team, whereupon it adopted a San Remo moniker. But it was Argentinian aces Juan Manuel Fangio and José Froilán González who really brought the 4CLT to prominence, in 1949. Although the engine proved troublesome, particularly with



Profiles get lower, longer and sexier from 6CM to 250F

a heavy-footed driver, the handling was much loved. Nuvolari, after a shared drive in the 1948 French GP, declared it the "best Maserati built". In England, privateers such as Reg Parnell (he bought three) and Prince Bira were good business for Maserati, and they scored some strong results, particularly at early Goodwood events. Development continued, with the cars slimmed down to 620kg, engines uprated and changes to the steering, but the 4CLT's days were numbered after Alfa adopted a de Dion set-up. Twenty were built, but by 1950/'51 the strain was showing for the outdated design, with poor reliability as power increased.

This early-series model, chassis 1598, was one of two 4CLTs bought by the Thai racing Prince, and it even led the '49 British GP until half distance when Bira hit a marker barrel at Copse and damaged the front suspension. Once obsolete, 1598, like many old racing cars,

was sold to South America, where it had a Chevy V8 engine transplant. After a tough life it was rescued by car-hunter Colin Crabbe. The late American enthusiast Bob Sutherland sourced a spare engine, and Sean restored it to race-ready condition.

Like the 6CM, the 4CLT's cockpit is exposed, with a good stretch to the wheel. The upright seat is lower thanks to the drop-down gears in the axle, but again your knees are splayed around the gearbox with both centre throttle and brake to the right. Elegant white Maserati gauges are grouped off-centre to give room for the crooked gearlever to the left behind the steering wheel and between your legs. After a short tow the engine barks into life with a deafening rasp, and it feels really crisp once the revs rise. The noise is ferocious and, fully expecting orders to switch off, I quickly head to the track. The gearbox has a short, notchy gate but a lovely mechanical feel, while the steering has the same direct, light precision of the 6CM once through the initial wheel wobbles. Low down, the engine lacks the torque of the 'six', but with more revs and the blowers spinning, it really punches. We don't get close to the 240bhp peak at 6900rpm, but from 3-5000rpm it screams, pulling strongly. The brakes are little changed from the 6CM, but require a heftier push after they bite. Once you are firmly on them, the response is linear and powerful.

The biggest change is the chassis, with an improved ride and more forgiving manners. Where the 6CM demanded precision, the 4CLT feels much more controllable. In the tighter corners you can hang the tail out, steering on the throttle without fear of it snapping back.



From top: high-sided 250F cockpit with exposed spaceframe and wide transmission tunnel; effective wraparound windscreen

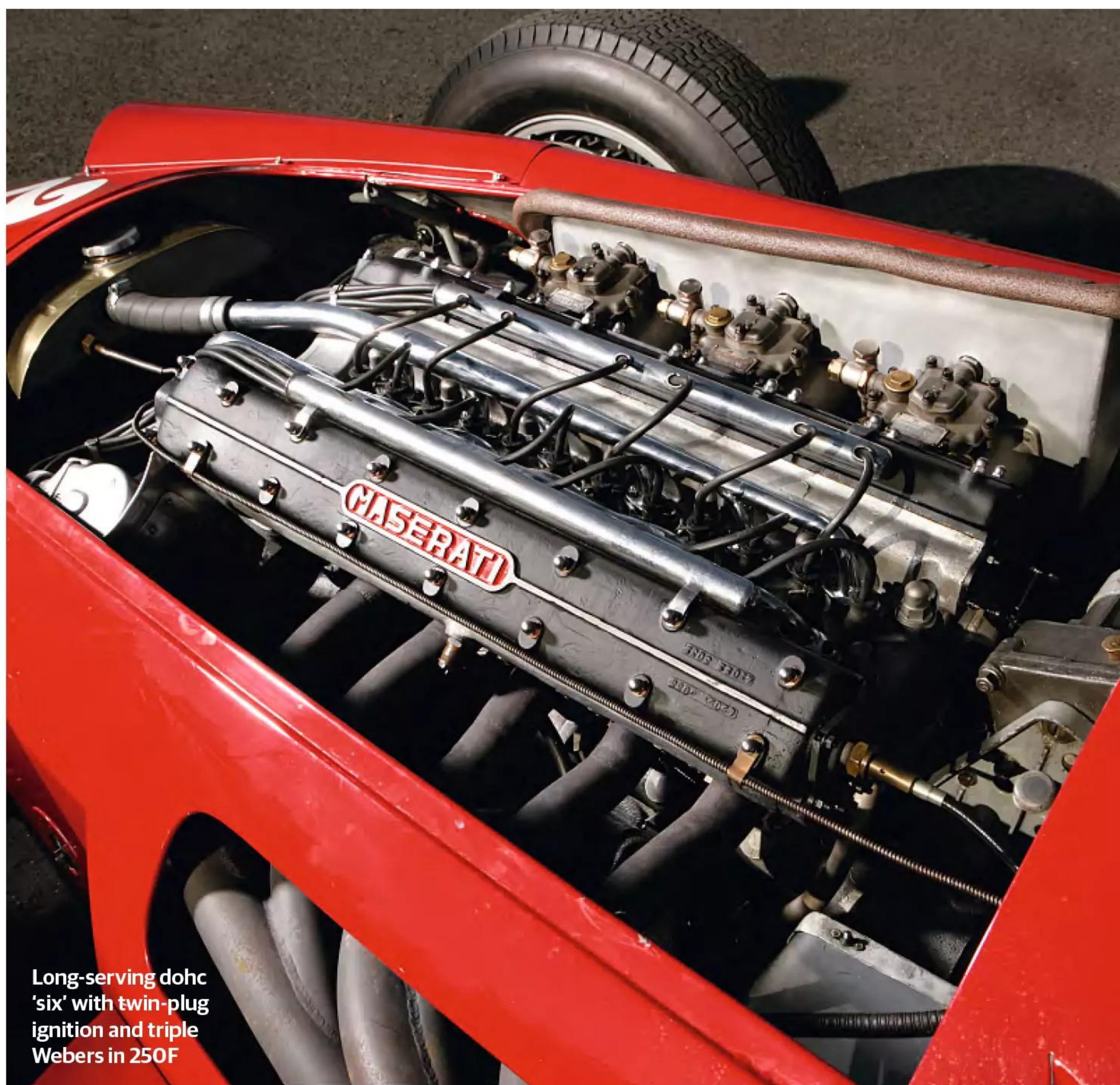


“It’s happy to oversteer, and you can throw it around more,” confirms Sean. “You have to be asleep to spin this one. I’ll never forget my first lap testing at Monza. Going through the second Lesmo at 7000rpm with a touch of opposite lock was a fantastic feeling.” With its supple suspension and more forgiving handling, this would be easier to drive in a long-distance race, particularly on rough roads and old airfields.

Although Sean loves the chassis, he’s not a fan of the complex engine: “In principle it was fine, but two-stage supercharging was the curse of the car. With four valves per cylinder, the huge combustion chambers resulted in massive heat and meltdown. The best drivers – such as Fangio – drove the hell out of the chassis but saved the engine. To run one competitively in period, you’d have to strip them after a long race. Although the chassis was an improvement, the engine was sophisticated but without the advantages.”

Working on these beautifully made 4CLTs may be a nightmare, but I loved its friendly handling and raucous urge. Compared to a lazy, unblown Talbot-Lago, the Latin competitor must have felt sharp and responsive, but while its evocative, kidney-shaped grille and long bonnet look terrific, it’s no match for the youngest of this trio, the legendary 250F.

In its end-of-line Lightweight form, the 250F is perhaps the most perfectly proportioned front-engined racer, from its slender prow to the riveted rump. During four seasons, the *due-cento cinquante-efte* won only eight World Championship Grands Prix – four of those to Fangio in his brilliant fifth-championship ’57 season – but, like the 6CM and the 4CLT, it was



Long-serving dohc 'six' with twin-plug ignition and triple Webers in 250F



also a racer for the privateer. What it lacked in ultimate power, the 250F made up for with superb poise on the limit. For rivals Ferrari, Mercedes-Benz or Vanwall, this user-friendliness was totally alien, and they’d never dream of building 34 cars.

Like the iconic Bugatti Type 35, this was virtually a production racer, and Stirling Moss was an enthusiastic customer. “It was lovely to drive and had more power than any British car I had been struggling with,” he recalled. “It steered beautifully. It was inclined towards stable oversteer, which you could exploit by balancing with power in sustained drifts.”

No one designer can take full credit for this classic shape. Gioachino Colombo, assisted by Luigi Bellantani, originated the design, while from 1954 Giulio Alfieri saw through the development. From its Buenos Aires debut in 1954, where it joined an elite group of first-time winners, the 250F’s power rose from 240 to 270bhp. The transaxle gained a fifth gear, the spaceframe got stronger, the drum brakes became more powerful and the body grew ever more beautiful. “Never the best by all counts,” said 250F anorak Denis Jenkinson, “but undoubtedly the best compromise.”

With its high body around the spaceframe, chassis 2513 is the trickiest to get into as you straddle the side, step into the corduroy seat and slip your legs under the dash. The meagre instrumentation, with bold Jaeger tachometer and mag switch, could be from any era, but not the right-hand throttle and wraparound ‘screen.

Yet the biggest change in this sparse, roomy cockpit is the short, slender gearlever sited high to the right in a dainty gate with dog-leg first. The unblown twin-plug ‘six’ fires after a short tow, blasting a deep roar down its fat, high-mounted exhaust. Unlike the 4CLT, the 250F pulls willingly from low down and delivers throughout the range as the sound sharpens. There is no flat-spot, just sweet, progressive power that really hauls above 4000rpm. Match that to a sensational, slick ‘box and you soon gain confidence to explore the 250F’s stunning pace. With a power-to-weight ratio exceeding that of most ‘80s supercars, the wooded test track quickly feels confined. All three of these greats have superb steering, but the youngest has even better weight and precision. When the tail breaks away on fallen leaves it inspires you to keep the power on: there’s no better sensation. Every aspect, from the intuitive brakes to the compliant ride, is on the driver’s side in this fabulous racer.

That is the key link between all three. Designed and built with huge pride, these magnificent racers – be it junior *voiturette* or Grand Prix great – were as much about satisfied clientele as racing glory. No Ferrari or Lotus had such generous spirit. Given one last can of fuel, I’d take the 250F for a final blast, but I can’t conceive, as beautiful as they are, why you would ever want to lock up any of them.

Thanks to Chris Routledge of Coys, Sean Danaher and mechanic Dave Card

EL MAESTRO'S

The Maserati 300S driven to sports car victories by Juan Manuel Fangio is a rush of racing history restored to its original, long-nosed glory

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TIM SCOTT/FLUID IMAGES**



MASERATI



Fangio sat here. That thought alone makes this Maserati's cockpit a very special place. The seat has been retrimmed and the bodywork remade, but *El Maestro*, in his final full championship year, gunned this same, beautiful Latin thoroughbred to three victories in its early life, on both sides of the Atlantic.

Looking at the black-faced Jaeger rev counter, holding the flat, wood-rimmed steering wheel and glancing over the low Perspex 'screen, the image of *El Chueco*'s first victory around the Circuito de Monsanto is easily conjured, even before that fabulous 3-litre, twin-cam 'six' barks into life.

Enough daydreaming of times past. Push in the clockwork-style key and the fuel pumps start to clatter like castanets. Next is the wonderful Magneti Marelli magneto switch that is shared with the Maserati 250F – a charming crossover of engineering. After three clockwise clicks, we're ready to press the starter and wake that 280bhp double-overhead-cam heart. Even on a cold day the twin-plug straight-six erupts with a sharp rasp that spits and pops through the triple 42DCO3 Weber carburettors as it warms. Today, the radiator even has to be taped up to help.

While waiting, I review the spartan cockpit. The dashboard layout is basic: a black Jaeger gauge marked to 8000rpm, with two smaller SACMA dials for temperature and oil pressure on each side, are behind the wheel. To the left are chassis plates and accessible fuse and relay boxes, perfectly placed for working passengers on longer road races. Beefy chassis tubes surround the cockpit, while the superb bucket

seats, with three vents in the back, offer comfort and support – it's little known that the 300S drivetrain was offset by 40mm to give the driver more space. The gearlever is ideally sited, to the right of the tunnel, with a stubby lever and short H-pattern gate, plus a flick-up cover protecting reverse.

With a racing clutch, accelerating away from a standstill is tricky, but, once rolling, the gearchange is fantastic and the close ratios are perfectly matched to the sweet-revving, dry-sump 'six'. The longer-stroke 3-litre Vittorio Ballentani design delivers more torque

'With the low windscreen and no crash helmet, the sheer velocity produces a freezing rush of wind that takes my breath away'

compared with the fabulous 250F and has no flat spots. After a little hesitation and spitting from 1800-2400rpm, it starts to pull hard once warm and sings like Caruso above 4000rpm. To my ears, that glorious roar from the twin exhausts on the passenger side sounds sweeter than any tenor.

Along the roads of Norfolk's desolate Fens, it could almost be a test run around Bologna in 1957 – a regular pattern for works mechanics and engineering chief Gino Bertocchi when there wasn't time to get to the Autodromo di Modena. Stirling Moss and Denis 'Jenks'

Jenkinson did much of their testing for the Mille Miglia in examples of the 300S around the Emilia-Romagna region, and Moss would rate the car as one of his favourite sports-racers.

The four-wheel drum brakes have impressive feel and power – racing aces claimed that the beautiful drums stopped as well as early discs. Today, however, replacements for the original asbestos linings are difficult to source.

On long, open straights the 300S is eager to stretch its legs, and the urgent power delivery launches this beauty to impressive speeds. With tall Le Mans gearing, the Maserati was good for 170mph (the last cars had five-speed 'boxes'), but the bumps, crests and falling cambers of the Fens demand restraint. It's an evocative area, dotted with open railway crossings, isolated farms and spectacular skies, but even here the lipstick-red Latin racer attracts attention – including from a carpenter who rushes out with his camera to capture the sleek, sweeping form as it speeds by.

Within the two-year assembly of 26 cars, the Fantuzzi-designed 300S body shape had three styles, evolving from the stubbier early short-nose to the final, more aerodynamic long-nose we have here. I adore them all, but the third series of works machines with their muscular,



Clockwise from top: Fangio dominated in Brazil; 300S draws a crowd; chatting with Italian mechanics at São Paulo before the start of the Brazilian Grand Prix





Above: simple cabin with centrally mounted fuse and relay boxes.
Below: fabulous straight-six shares componentry with the famous 250F



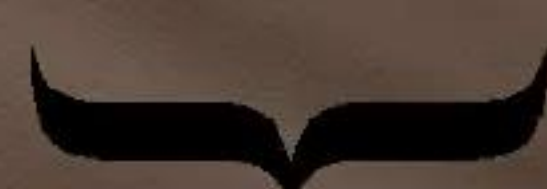
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'Fangio was as smooth as ever, drifting the long-nose 300S around the scenic Lisbon park circuit to take pole position'



450S-style rear, 'sharknose' bonnet ducts and five vertical side vents are the most attractive. Bootlid cutouts reveal wonderful details that include aviation-style flip-up filler caps and a glimpse of the riveted tanks. It has all the purity of form of a Macchi C250 Veltro fighter plane.

Through the corners, the super-responsive worm-and-gear steering set-up equals the rest of this brilliant machine. The sharp turn-in, perfect weight balance and tall, 6in-wide rubber deliver inspiring feel. Having watched historic racing aces Willie Green and Martin Stretton command this agile masterpiece, steering on the throttle through Raidillon or Sainte-Dévote, it's a tease on these rough roads, and I wish the corners here were smooth and open for powersliding out of the apex. But the character of the car through the lively controls is still easy to appreciate.

Back on the main road for one last blast up through the gears, the performance and sound of this 780kg rocket are awesome. With the low windscreen and no crash helmet, the sheer velocity produces a freezing rush of wind that takes my breath – and cap – away.

Fangio was only contracted by the factory for single-seaters, but if the money was right from a privateer with a competitive car, the canny Argentinian hero was happy to guest drive on a weekend that didn't clash with Grand Prix commitments. So it was that, when a sports car race was staged around the scenic Lisbon park circuit, Fangio was the star attraction. The car was entered by business manager Marcello Giambertone, and the factory was keen to support hero Fangio to help promote further sales of 300S racers to wealthy privateers.

The Circuito de Monsanto wouldn't stage an F1 Grand Prix for another two years, but the sports car feature on 9 June 1957 drew huge crowds. Fangio's main rivals were two young

Americans in Ferraris, Phil Hill and fearless 25-year-old Masten Gregory, the 'Kansas City Flash'. The race turned into a close contest between the event's oldest and youngest drivers, a gripping duel of Fangio's Maserati versus Gregory's Ferrari that left the remainder of the 18-car field choking in their dust.

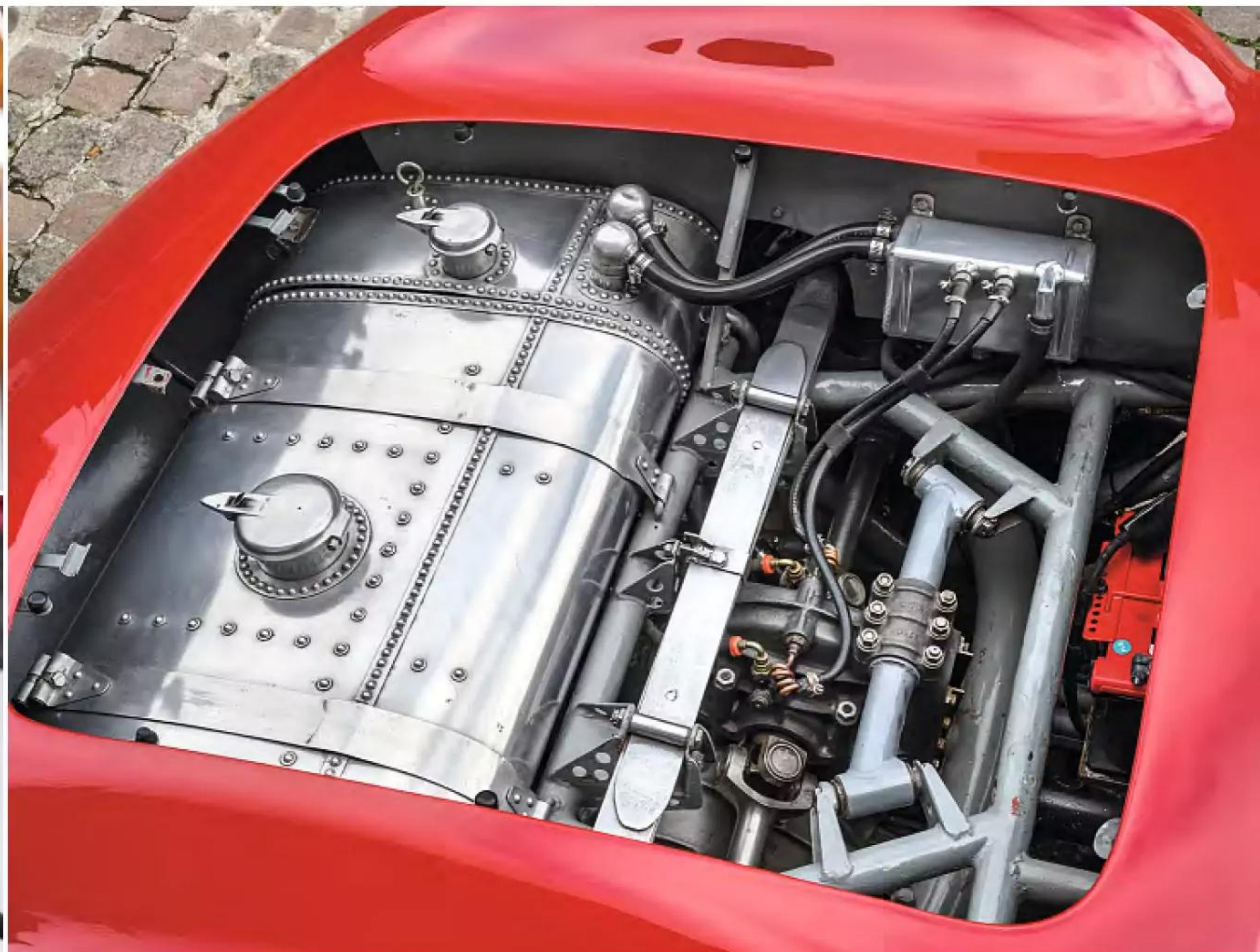
The 3.38-mile road circuit was a challenge, featuring fast sweepers and tight hairpins across mixed surfaces and tramlines. With flat-out *autostrada* straights in the bright sun, then cutting through the cool, shady pines, Fangio was as effortless as ever over this undulating layout, drifting the long-nose 300S just like his favourite 250F to take pole position. But the wild Gregory, in an 860 Monza, was close behind and clearly a challenge; he also knew just how beautifully the 300S handled, having raced one for the Parravano team in the USA.

More than 50,000 spectators came to watch *El Maestro* battle Gregory, and they weren't disappointed. When the national flag dropped, the extra grunt of the Ferrari's 3.4-litre 'four' gave an edge in acceleration, but maybe the veteran was wise to follow the bespectacled American: he was fast but accident-prone. For 10 laps Ferrari led Maserati in close formation; Fangio pushed Gregory until he made a mistake and then, with a masterful overtake, seized command. Well clear of the struggling Hill in the other Ferrari, Gregory gave his all but just couldn't catch the super-smooth Fangio. After 55 laps, just two seconds separated the leading pair, with Gregory setting the fastest lap on the final tour. The nearest rival was the 300S of Carlos Menditéguy in third, two laps behind.

If you visit Lisbon, it is worth getting up early for a morning walk around the Monsanto Forest Park, but Fangio's winning Maserati is now in far better condition than the old track. Following the Portuguese win, Giambertone



This angle of the Fantuzzi body was most often seen approaching very fast in rear-view mirrors. Above: chassis-number stamp



Clockwise from above:
three-step ignition switch;
Jaeger and SACMA dials;
beautiful riveted petrol and
oil tanks behind transverse
leaf spring and transaxle;
offset gearbox gave more
room for the driver





Late-series long-nose was judged the best-looking 300S, but the magnificent, resonating exhaust note was a constant

shipped 3069 to South America. On 1 December 1957, Fangio was back in the driving seat for the São Paulo Grand Prix. Around the fast Interlagos circuit, the veteran was again in a class of his own with the 300S taking a win in each heat. Seven days later, 3069 was trailered to Rio de Janeiro. A huge local crowd turned out to support the champion at the Circuito da Boavista, where even a one-minute penalty for a jump-start couldn't stop him winning again. Today the car carries Fangio's famous number 4 and Castrol sponsorship from that final São Paulo podium.

The victory impressed Brazilian playboy Severino Gómez-Silva, who made an offer that Giambertone couldn't refuse. Although an enthusiastic racer with his 200S, Gómez-Silva preferred to take the 300S out along the Copacabana Beach to impress the ladies. Through various Brazilian owners right up to 1972, chassis 3069 continued to be raced locally, but you'd never recognise it because the gorgeous original aluminium bodywork was replaced by a rather different, boxy design – and was incongruously repainted yellow.

The Maserati eventually went into storage until 1979, when it was discovered by legendary car hunter Colin Crabbe on one of his many sleuthing trips to South America. A deal was done for \$7000 and 3069, stripped of its yellow body, was shipped to the workshop of Antique Automobiles in Baston, Lincolnshire, on the edge of the Fens. Historic racer Chris Drake eventually had 3069 fully restored with a new body, and by 1988 it was back in Italy, where Count Zanon entered it in the '88 Mille Miglia Storica. After passing through the hands of a series of well-known collectors and historic racers – including Massimo Columbo, Michel Seydoux and Lord Irvine Laidlaw – 3069 was sold in 1999 to Scottish-born American William Binnie. A highly experienced racer in both moderns and historic, including three Le Mans sorties, Binnie loved racing the 300S.

Over the following 20 years he ticked all the premier event boxes, including the 1000 Miglia, Le Mans Classic, Goodwood Revival and the much-missed Shell Historic Ferrari Maserati Challenge.

The 300S remains one of my all-time favourite sports-racers, and although a cold, misty winter's day on the Fens couldn't be much further removed from that hot summer Lisbon weekend in 1957, the chance to drive one of the 26 Trident beauties is enough excitement to stop me sleeping the night before. The reason this late-development 300S is now temporarily based in East Anglia is for fettling by Steve Hart, a leading Maserati specialist, on behalf of dealer Fiskens. Walking into Steve's Norfolk workshop is a treat for any fan of historic racing, but particularly admirers of the golden years of the Orsi-era Maseratis. As well as three more examples of the 300S, including 3067, which also ended up in Brazil with a modified yellow body, there's a clutch of 250Fs in various stages of work.

It was the restoration of Steve's first 300S back in 1991, while he was working for historic racing specialist Neil Twyman, that kick-started his love affair with post-war racing Maseratis. More than 30 years ago, Steve took me for a drive around a Hertfordshire industrial estate in the ex-works 300S 3056/3077, and the sound as we drifted around roundabouts on a summer evening left an indelible memory. As well as a respected specialist, Steve is also an impressive driver.

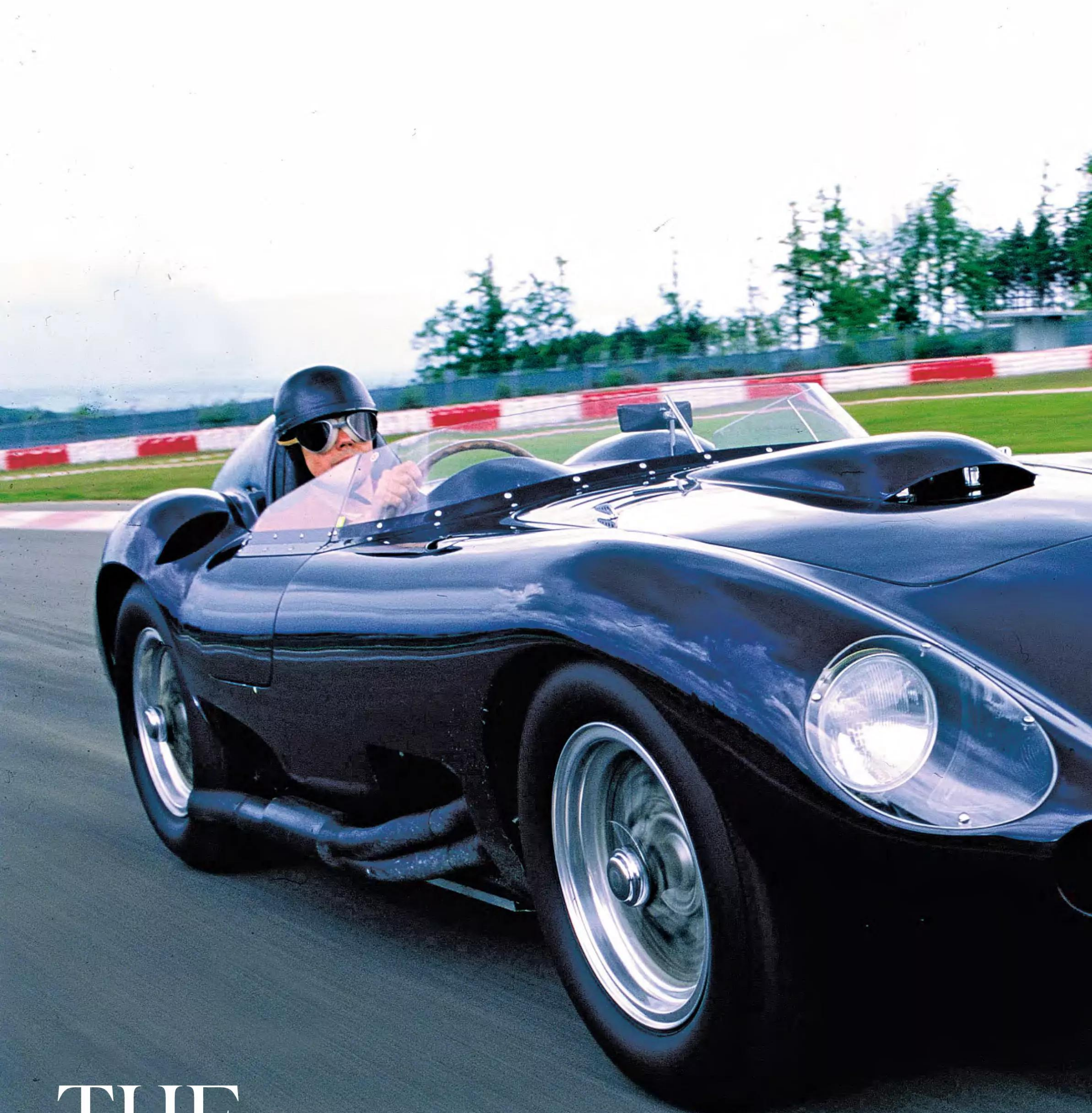
"Like a lot of things, I've learnt to love them," he enthuses. "Everything about the design and construction is beautiful – you can tell the mechanics were proud of their work. The 300S is really well designed: the deep chassis has great stiffness and, thanks to the transaxle, the weight balance is perfect. With the original

'Maybe it's time the Goodwood Revival staged a Supercortemaggiore-style grid to lure the 300S back to the track'

set-up of soft springs and stiff Houdaille dampers it's lovely to drive, particularly at my favourite tracks, Spa and Dijon."

Frustratingly, the increased development of Jaguar-powered '50s sports-racers has deterred 300S owners from racing them, and even on the 1000 Miglia retrospective they are rarely seen. Only by driving a 300S do you get to appreciate its greatness, so maybe it's time the Goodwood Revival staged a Supercortemaggiore-style grid for 1950s Maseratis, Ferraris and Oscas to lure them back to the track. Had I millions to indulge, I'd be knocking at the door of Fiskens' London mews showroom. 

Thanks to Gregor Fiskens (fiskens.com); Steve Hart (stevehartracing.com); historian Walter Bäumer, author of the definitive book on the Maserati 300S, published by Dalton Watson (daltonwatson.com)



THE BIG HAWG



The big-bore 450S was Maserati's ultimate – if flawed – sports-racer. Where better to unleash its massive grunt than at the Nürburgring?

WORDS MICK WALSH PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER

Carroll Shelby christened the magnificent Maserati 450S the 'Big Hawg'. Looking like a sleek 300S distorted in a fairground hall of mirrors, this mean, muscular monster is the overlord of the 1950s sports-racing cars. From its prying, python-like snout to its *Rambo*-esque rear wheelarches, this big-bore contender looks the epitome of trouble well before its 4.5-litre four-cam V8 has erupted into life.

Only much more recently has its proud title as the most powerful front-engined sports-racer been usurped by the Panoz LMP. Just 10 of these brutes were built and, when left redundant by the governing body's 3-litre limit for the 1958 European season, these outlawed 'Hawgs' headed west, where wealthy American teamsters such as John Edgar, Frank Harrison and Ebb Rose continued development with even bigger powerboat motors. On the wide, open airfield tracks at Mansfield, Galveston and Hammond, the likes of Shelby, Jim Hall and Masten Gregory were star attractions. Once wrestled around the turns, the Modenese monster would really let rip, storming down long straights like Frankenstein's monster on fire. But as special road courses were built, the 450S was outclassed by nimbler, younger rivals. Many were 'Chevroliized' when the Bellentani/Alfieri-designed four-cam gave trouble.

These trident-badged terrors are rarely seen out in historics and, when they are, owners are quickly intimidated by their fearsome performance and tricky handling. But for the wealthy collector, its fabled reputation gives irresistible prestige. Millionaire banker and McLaren F1 racer Thomas Escher has occasionally run the ex-John Edgar team car, 4506, while the most beautiful and best preserved, chassis 4502, is also in Germany. Ordered new by Tony Parravano to join his stable of Ferraris, it was never raced before the Italian-born construction magnate got into deep debt with the tax-collecting IRS. In 1958 his exotic equipe, including the 450S, was secretly transported to Mexico to avoid seizure by the authorities. Parravano mysteriously disappeared in April 1960; his body is still missing and the case remains unsolved.

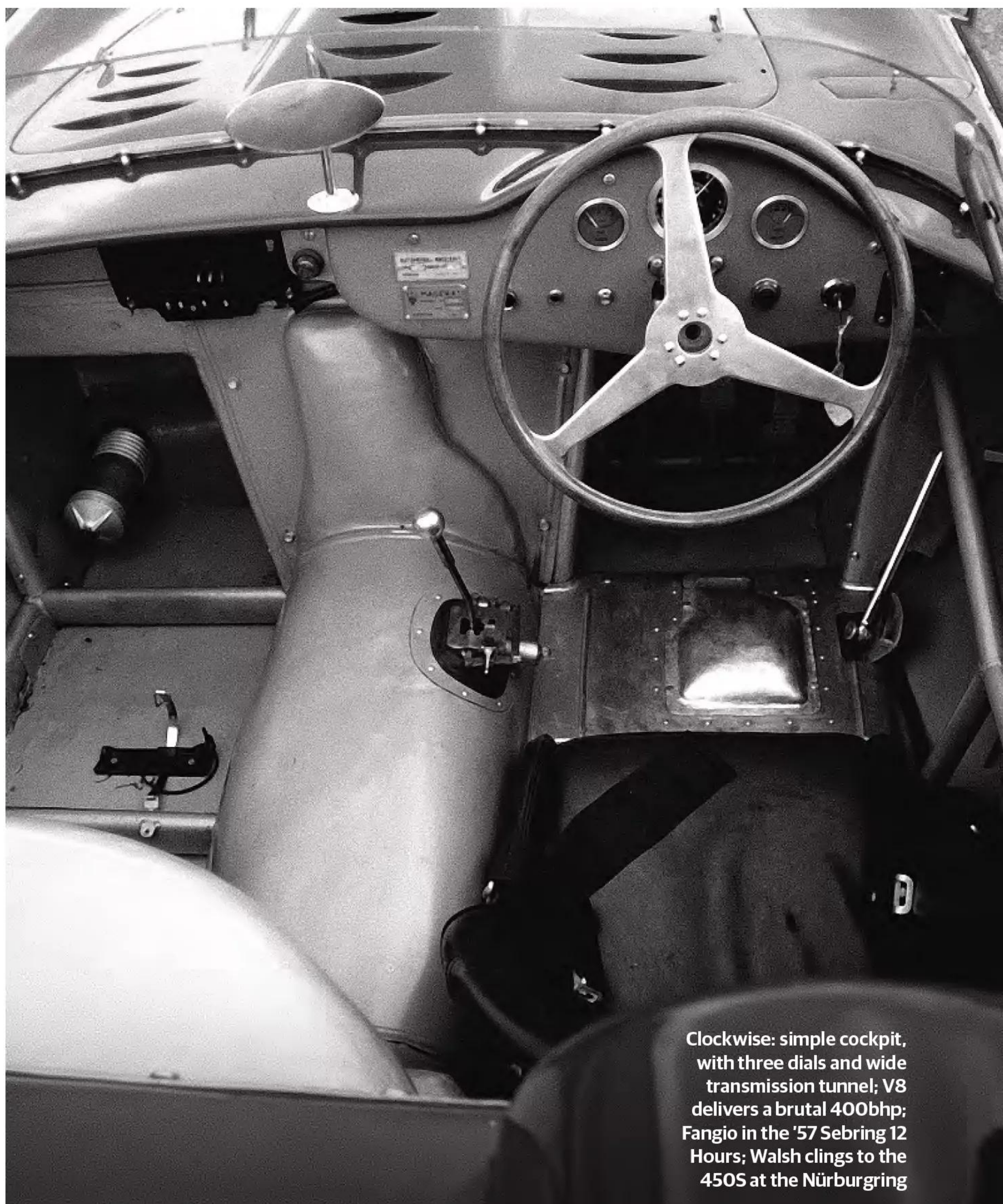
His 450S was acquired by Rey Martinez at an IRS auction in a San Fernando parking lot, and its few outings included a second place at Pomona, driven by rookie hotshot Billy Krause. Cameron Millar discovered 4502 in the '70s and returned it to Europe, but after a few outings he admitted the car scared him and sold it to Count Dunhof. The creator of the Oldtimer GP raced the now dark-blue brute and even completed two Mille Miglias before selling to another German connoisseur, Hartmut Ibing.

For me the 450S is the ultimate machine, combining favourite factors of fearsome grunt, '50s glamour and underdog status. While teenage chums were plotting ways to get into rock festivals, I was hitchhiking to JCB historic races to watch John Fellowes' 450S. Just to hear

its wild, baritone exhaust rumble moved me more than any Led Zeppelin riff. Reports of the 1957 race in Caracas, where almost certain championship glory slipped from Maserati's grasp as the 450S trio broke, crashed and caught fire, captivated me. In an ironic twist, the heroic fightback of Moss and Schell ended when teammate Bonnier's 300S lost a wheel just as the 450S was preparing to pass. The big-banger slammed into the wall and burst into flames as the 300S smashed into a lamp-post. The aftermath was caught by *Life* photographer Tom Burnside, whose shots captured a burnt and bandaged Schell walking about as if he had just dodged the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Valiant World Championship victories at Sebring and Kristianstad proved that on the right day the 450S could blitz rivals, but it took the gutsy Jean Behra to tame it.

My chance to sample this magnificent beast came at the Nürburgring, not thankfully on the challenging Nordschleife where the 450S jinx struck both team cars in the '57 1000km and a broken driveshaft for Moss resulted in a lost wheel and a hairy spin. Such stories only fuel the anticipation. Once in the simple, upright seat, the first impression is of how low you sit, slung beside the fat transmission tunnel with spindly, upright gearlever offset on the left. The instrumentation is sparse, with a rev counter between the smaller, blue-faced temperature and oil-pressure gauges. A thin, wood-rimmed three-spoke steering wheel and bland military-grey finish contrast with its X-rated form.

When that V8 erupts, guzzling greedily from four twin-choke Weber carbs, a wild, incensed rumble emits from those Howitzer side exhausts. Flex the throttle and its raging tenor stirs like a teased Godzilla. Engine outputs are heady stuff: 400bhp at 7700rpm, 325lb ft at



Clockwise: simple cockpit, with three dials and wide transmission tunnel; V8 delivers a brutal 400bhp; Fangio in the '57 Sebring 12 Hours; Walsh clings to the 450S at the Nürburgring

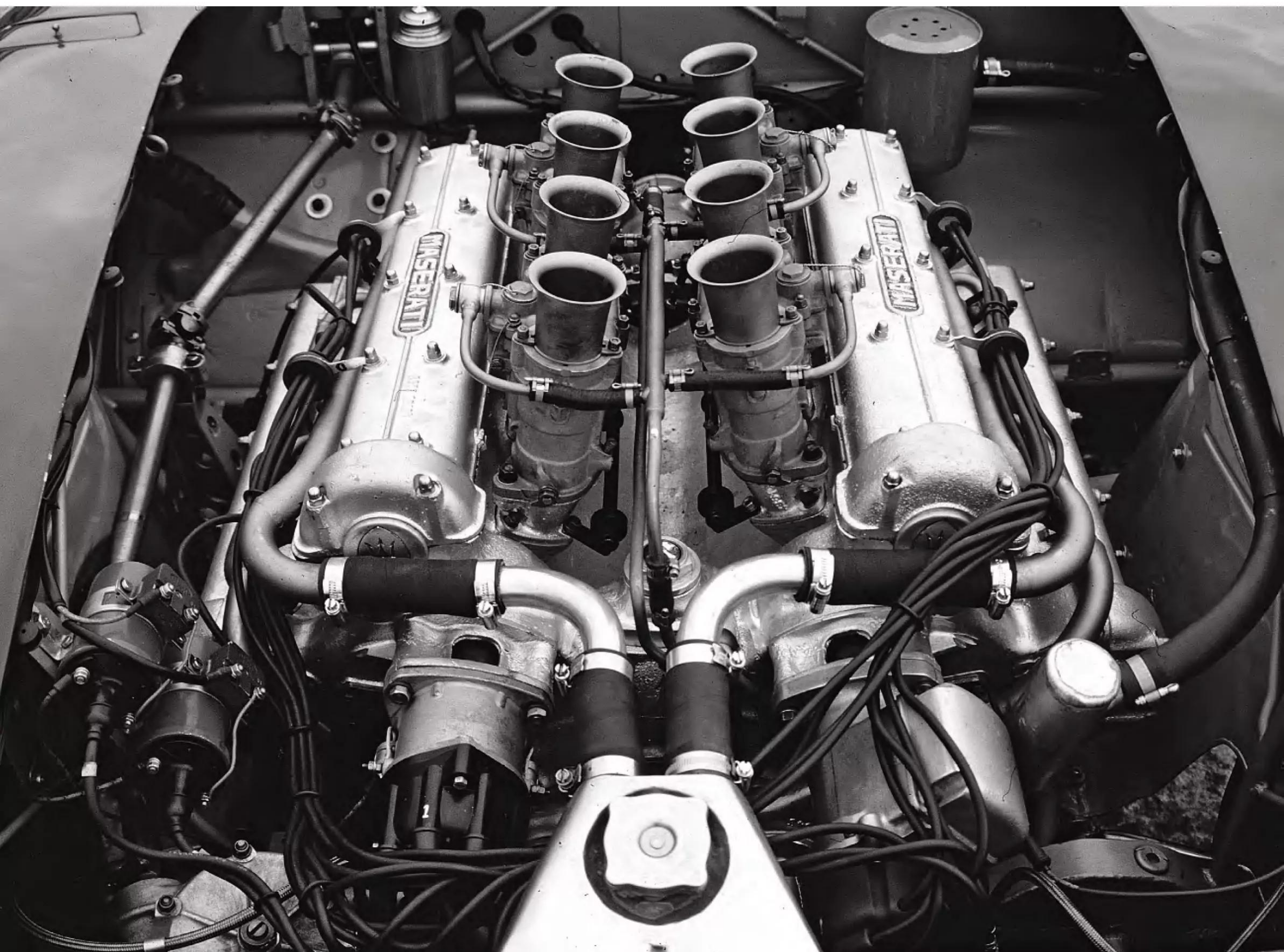


5500rpm – but this sports Maserati feels as if it could tow heavy freight well below that.

The controls are typically '50s Maserati, with sharp steering, a slick, precise gearchange and an easy clutch, but you're entirely focused on the limited grip: a dry track quickly feels wet because its 6in rear rubber melts as soon as you get confident with the throttle. Getting close to its 185mph maximum is unimaginable, but even in fifth the punch is relentless. That spectacular delivery is up there with Can-Am muscle; not surprisingly, brake fade is soon an issue when you unleash its wild horses.

This car is a handful. Even after five laps I felt sapped but hugely exhilarated; only a ride in a Corvette Grand Sport has matched its theatre. Historics supremo Willie Green reckoned the tail would just go, destroying any handling balance as soon as you put the boot in. He said: "At Silverstone the tyres didn't bite until halfway down the pit straight."

Moss was dismissive: 'A case of brute force and ignorance, lacking any of the delicacy essential in most road races.' But I still worship this fearsome folly. 



THE SPORTS-RACERS THAT HID THEIR CLASS

Post-WW2 Maserati sports-racing models split into three distinct periods under the Orsi organisation, but the fervent belief was that racing enhanced sales – even when drained of finances. The highpoint of the pre-'52 era was the development of the A6GCS series, which quickly garnered a reputation for supreme balance, irresistible styling and class-winning performance. Even as late as 1959 it would claim fifth overall on the Targa Florio.

The 2-litre's sales success encouraged a series of sports-racers from the forgiving 150 to the fearsome 450. Highlight of this second era was the sublime 300S, which Stirling Moss rated second only to the 'Birdcage' as his favourite front-engined sports Maserati. Its chassis was superior to Ferrari rivals, but the 250bhp 3-litre 'six' lacked the grunt for top-level glory. After quitting racing activities in '58, Orsi, spurred on by Alfieri and Bertocchi,



developed a radical sport car design: the Tipo 60 and 61 'Birdcage', which the American Camoradi team financed and raced for Maserati. Yet this brilliant machine, like its rear-engined successor, never realised its true potential. The third chapter included a series of ultra-fast but under-developed Le Mans coupés, but it ended tragically with 'Lucky'

Casner's horrendous crash at the 1965 test day after a multiple flip on the Mulsanne. A last effort, sponsored by French agent Colonel Simone and engineered by Alfieri, was the open Tipo 65, but skilled drivers Jo Siffert and Jochen Neerpasch were terrified by the car's instability at high speed. Thankfully for all it crashed without injury on lap one.

SPAGHETTI SPECIAL

Nothing could touch Moss and Gurney in a 'Birdcage' at the 'Ring. Retracing their tracks isn't for the faint-hearted

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

Against the silver-ribbed shutters of the Nürburgring paddock, the white Maserati 'Birdcage' looked almost luminescent. Compared to the flowing power styling of Jaguar and Ferrari, designer Giulio Alfieri's scantily-clad, spaceframed wonder looked, well, distinctive if you're feeling polite, pug-ugly if you're not. If it wasn't for the car's sparkling reputation, particularly at the 'Ring, you'd laugh at this spaghetti special. With the sketchy body's taut line hugging the tall wheels, sills and motor, the Tipo 61 has a haughty, cocksure presence. And this particular car, chassis 2461, is prouder than any of the other 19 built.

Against the odds (weren't Maseratis always?) this very car gave its all when pushed by Stirling Moss and Dan Gurney to take a heroic victory, thrashing Ferrari and Porsche in the 1960 1000km race. For 7 hours, 31 minutes and 40.5 seconds it forged through treacherous rain and blinding fog to a dry finish in front of

a record crowd of 250,000. Not even an oil slick in the cockpit and a 5¼-minute pit stop could baulk its determined charge.

Thanks to the generosity of owner Hartmut Ibing, 2461 was allowed to wake from its winter hibernation in the Nürburgring Museum and retrace its historic tracks around the legendary Nordschleife. I had soaked up all the nostalgia for this privileged drive. Somehow I always imagine that particular race in black and white, because conditions on that damp, grim Sunday precluded the use of slow colour film. For once Moss wasn't first away, letting a young Jim Clark in the Border Reivers Aston Martin DBR1 take the early lead.

Getting into a Birdcage requires a little patience to open the door. Forget the fiddly clip on the Perspex window and there will be an embarrassing crack – and you're in for a long and draughty race. Step over the sill, drop into the bright blue, cotton-upholstered bucket and the roomy cockpit is as functional as the racer's exterior. With the three-spoke, wood-rimmed steering wheel and a cluster





of baby-blue Jaeger dials positioned ahead of the maze of chassis tubing, you initially feel as if there are panels missing.

We are short of time today, even with an early start, so restorer Steve Hart impatiently signals to fire the engine to get it up to temperature. The 2.5-litre 'four' chunters reluctantly to life and, for several minutes, pops and bangs through the tubby sidepipe. Its exhaust blat is a long way from the sweet bark of Maserati's famous straight-sixes, but it still makes me flinch when I gun the revs.

The gearchange is superbly slick. Once you're over the challenge of starting off from rest – a task not helped by a high first gear and a razor-sharp racing clutch – the five-speeder has a rapid action. The selector is sited down by the driver's right leg, much like in the 250F; first gear is a dog-leg on the inside and back. If you're too timid with the revs, the blat of the engine quickly dies to an embarrassing silence. I have to master the start-off quickly, because the short public-road section to the toll booth for the Nordschleife requires four stop-starts, including a steep, challenging ramp to the entrance. This is the second time I've driven a Birdcage up this incline: two years ago a grumpy attendant turned us back, refusing to let the historic Maserati run because it was unsilenced and carried race numbers. My protestations about the legend of Moss fell on deaf ears, and I nearly lost my temper before I reluctantly turned chassis 2461 away. This time, however, he shelters from the drizzle in his hut before he gestures us through.

Dropping down to the five consecutive left-right twists of Hatzenbach, I instantly rejoice at the Birdcage's rack-and-pinion steering. Even at a low pace the action is light and smooth, but as speed rises the weighting just gets better: no Ferrari or Jaguar has such finesse or precision. The communication to the driver is go-kart crisp and inspires smooth technique to guide it through the high kerbs of this treacherous, shady section. But during the intimidating helter-skelter of Hocheichen and on to the Flugplatz, the Birdcage feels on your side.

This is a super-responsive machine. If you are over-cautious into turns, particularly with a light fuel load, the front end wants to understeer off line, but use the power to neutralise the situation and the car starts to balance out. Thanks to a surfeit of low-down grunt and instant throttle response, it's easy to appreciate the Birdcage's nimble poise. The rear end has high reserves of grip, so it's not the heroic powerslides of the 250F, rather a neat drift with a bias to restrained understeer.

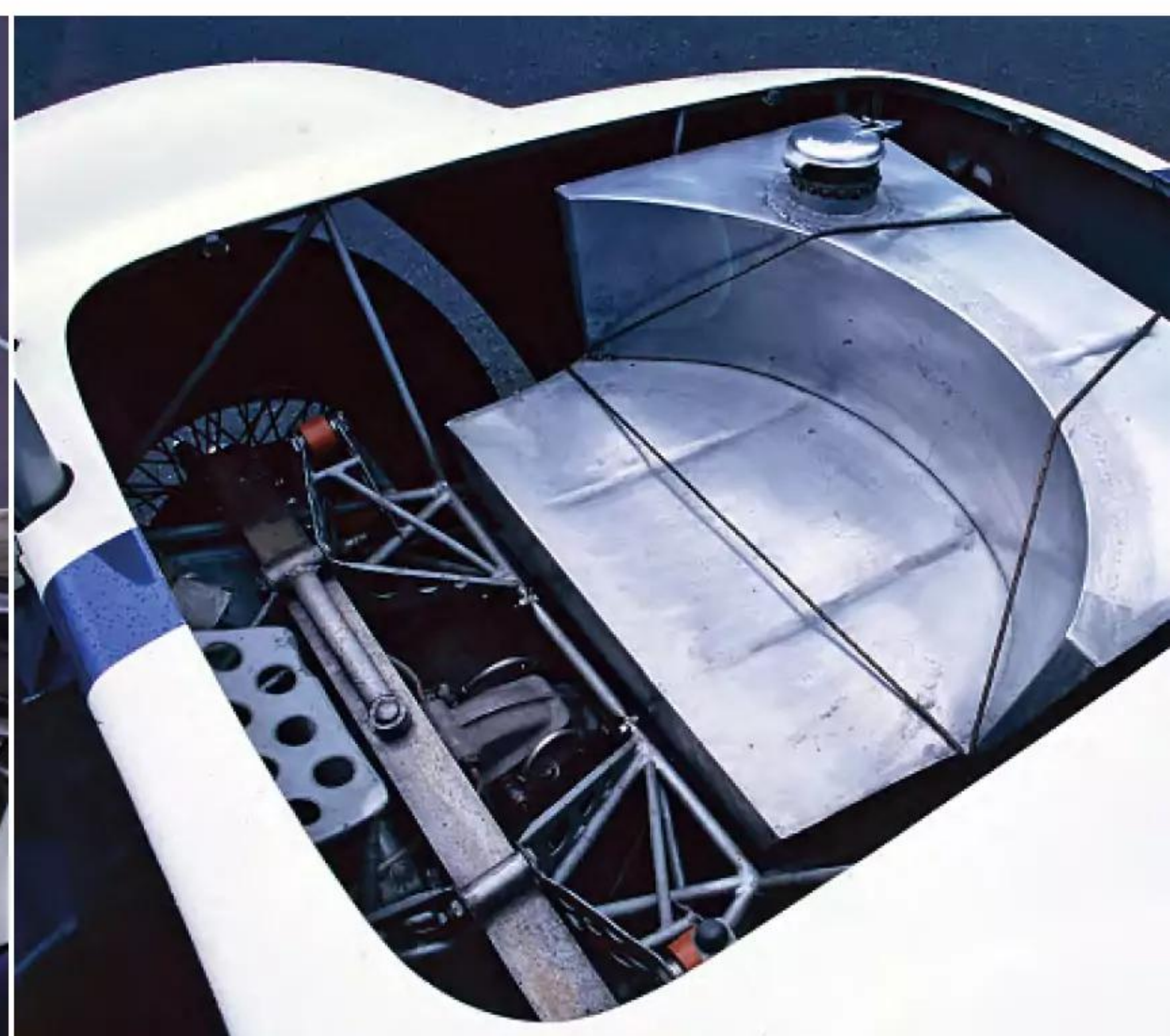
If you get overconfident and the rear gets a little too tweaked on the damp track, the steering makes it easy to correct. The chassis has fantastic balance and would flatter even modest talent. Put an ace like Moss or Gurney in the hotseat and the Birdcage would blitz any front-engined sports racer – it took Colin Chapman's genius to break its dominance.

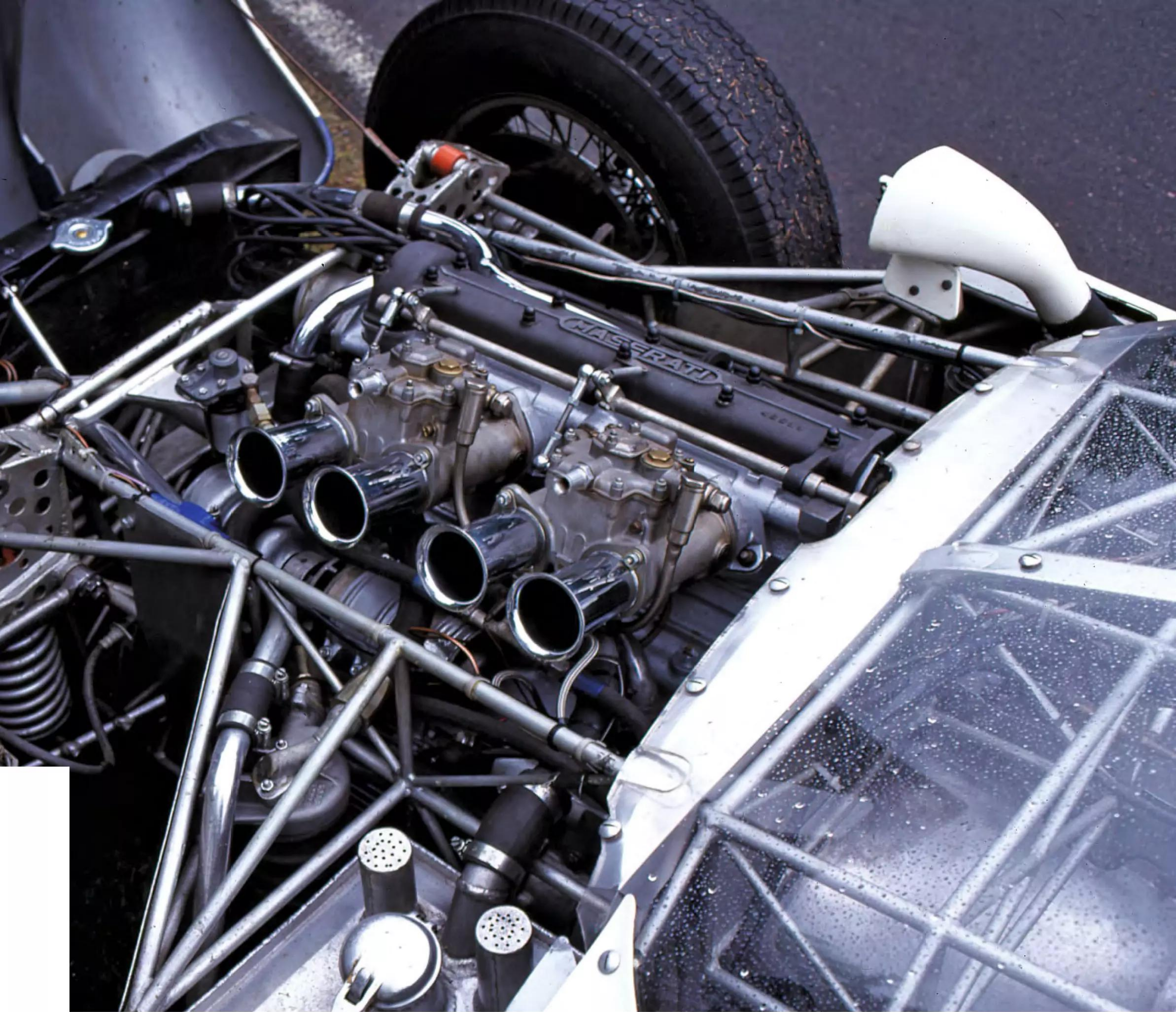
The Tipo 61's supreme handling balance was perfectly suited to Moss, whose technique of taking an early apex with the brakes on and drifting through the turns was ideal for this

The 2.9-litre 'four' is canted over at 45°, fed by a pair of twin-choke Webers for 250bhp at 6000rpm



Clockwise from main: spacious cockpit is ideal for long-distance comfort; fuel tank is shaped to accommodate the spare wheel; offset pedals, dual brake cylinders behind





'As the revs climb, the exhaust note remains intrusive, blatting ever louder. It's a sonorous, wearying bellow'

highly responsive sports-racer. Undramatic contemporary pictures reveal his smooth, textbook method but not his rocket speed. He said of his Maserati experience: "I was so impressed by my first test at Modena in 1959 that I asked Maserati to take a car to the Nürburgring for a trial, but it seized on me before I completed a lap. After the Aston it felt fantastically easy to drive. The steering was exceptionally light and the brakes superb."

With a power-to-weight ratio of nearly 400bhp per ton – it weighs just under 1300lb – performance is seriously quick. With ratios as close as overcooked pasta, it guns out of Aremberg and other open corners with big-hearted go. The wider, 6.50x16in Dunlop racing tyres offer astonishing grip, and the Birdcage responds like a superbike, with awesome thrust but minimal fuss. Its double-overhead-cam four-cylinder heart lacked the glamour and sound of the V12s of Maserati's Modena neighbour, but, laid slightly offset at

45°, it delivers a heavyweight punch. With a longer stroke for the 2.9-litre Tipo 61, and primed by a pair of thirsty Weber 48DCOE's, 250bhp at 6500rpm was more than enough to keep this nimble chassis well out in front even at power circuits such as Sebring. It's a coarse engine that, despite its lusty torque, doesn't clear its throat until 4000rpm. As the revs climb, the exhaust note remains intrusive, blatting ever louder. It's a sonorous, wearying bellow accompanied by rude, gobbling carbs. For a long thrash – Moss' first stretch was 14 laps, close to 250 miles and 2¼ intense hours at the wheel – you'd want earplugs.

But at least the cockpit is spacious and superbly comfortable. Although Moss and Gurney differed hugely in height, they both recall the Birdcage's driving position as excellent. With a fixed seat, the British ace had an ingenious cushion insert made to compensate. "I liked to lean back in the seat with arms stretched out, a style I admired in the



DAN THE MAN

The son of a successful opera singer, Dan Gurney had come a long way since he first raced his TR2 at Torrey Pines in 1955. Two years younger than Stirling Moss, the tall, clean-cut Gurney had avidly read about the Englishman in *Road & Track* and held him in high esteem. "For me he was always the uncrowned champ," recalled Gurney. "Stirling was motor racing's first superstar and a fantastic athlete. The chance to drive with him at the 'Ring was a great honour."

"Lucky [Casner] was a real character, a fantastic salesman and an entrepreneurial pioneer. He and his sidekick Fred Gamble busted the bank at Goodyear for race sponsorship. He had full support from the Maserati factory, and with Stirling and Bertocchi, and Taruffi as team manager, we felt really good about that race.

"The Birdcage wasn't a super-easy car to drive or particularly user-friendly. You couldn't take liberties with it, but its speed always surprised me. After a lap you'd stop and look at the watches and discover you'd gone much quicker than you thought. If it stayed together it really put the other guys in the shade. At Sebring we had retired for 20 minutes and were still in the lead.

"The four-cylinder Maserati engines were similar to the Coventry Climax FPF:

tough, with great torque but, in contrast with Ferrari, little extra at the top end."

After very limited practice due to problems with the Maserati's handling, Gurney drove the second race session, taking over from Moss on lap 14. 'Jenks' reported that he did a 'wonderful job and kept up the pace set by Moss', but on lap 20 a second oil line broke (the first had happened in practice). Gurney recalled: "The pipe unscrewed from the scavenge pump return and filled the cockpit with oil. It happened at the high point of the circuit just beyond the Karussell. I nursed her back to the pits, coasting down the hills, and by the time I'd reached the pits, the oil was about an inch deep. Bertocchi put his hand on his head, convinced it was all over. He was all for putting us in Masten's car, but eventually he got the message that I'd been tender with the engine, so he replenished the lost oil and sent me back out."

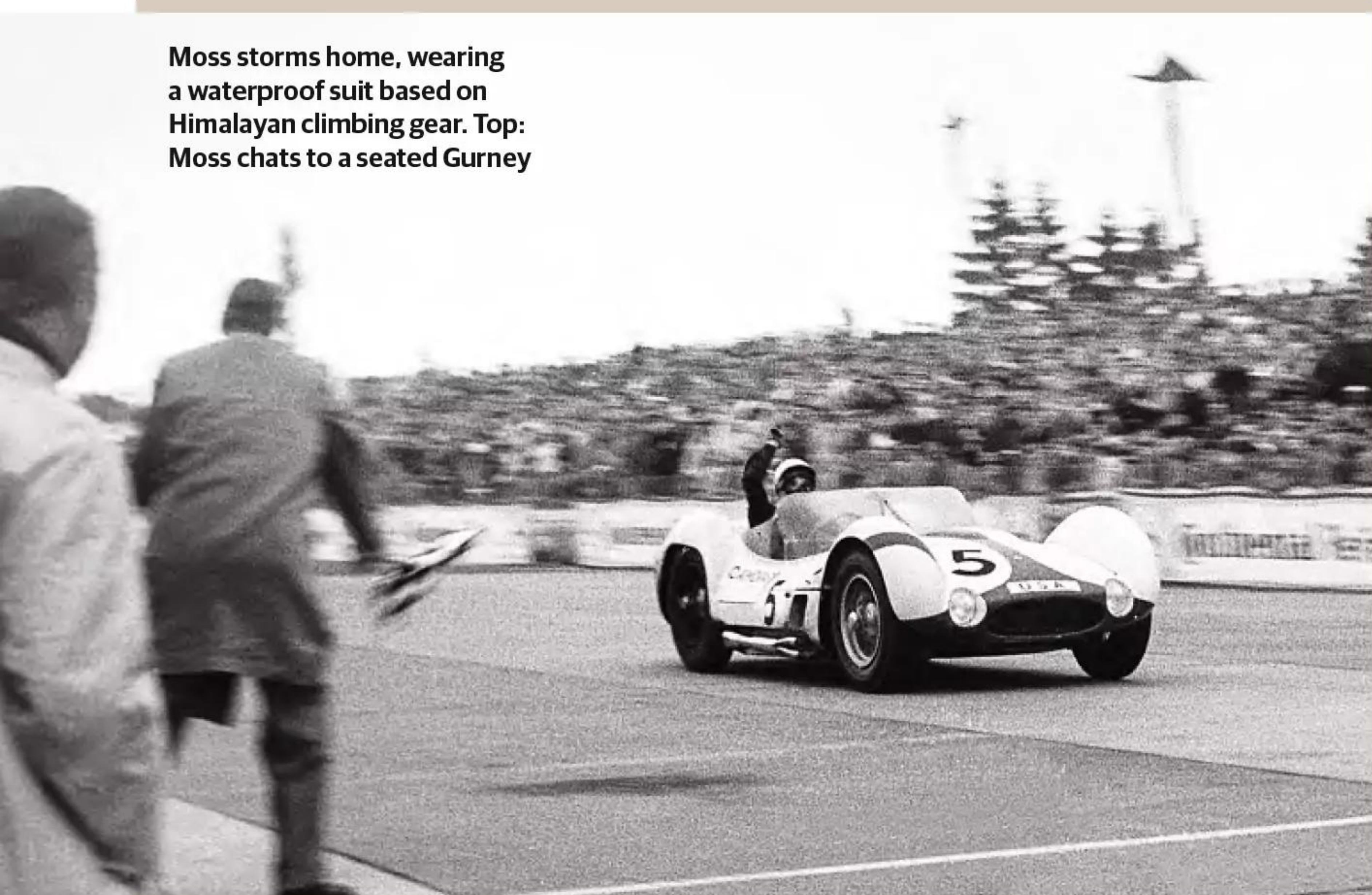
The lengthy pit stop took 5¼ mins, but Gurney stormed through the treacherous fog and, by the time he handed back to Moss on lap 30, the Camoradi team was out in front."Bertocchi gave me a hug and paid me a big compliment for saving the car," said Gurney. "He was Fangio's old mechanic, and that meant a lot."

Gurney has certainly earned his qualification as a 'Ringmeister.



Walsh tackles the fearsome Nordschleife in challenging conditions, a testament in itself to the Birdcage's driver-friendly accessibility

Moss storms home, wearing a waterproof suit based on Himalayan climbing gear. Top: Moss chats to a seated Gurney



GETTY

great Farina, and so we only needed to raise the seat base," he recalled. "Although you looked over the deep Birdcage 'screen, the buffeting was non-existent and the car was ideal for long-distance races."

The braking power of the meaty Dunlop discs in this light chassis is fantastic, and you can easily see how Moss and Gurney clawed in their more powerful rivals. The brakes are offset from the Borrani wheels, allowing for a larger-diameter disc and improved cooling. Not only are they very powerful, but the pedal pressure required is also light. Moss recalled them as "fantastic and fade-free".

The first six miles soar by as the Birdcage dazzles through Metzgesfeld and Kallenhard before the dive down to Adenau bridge. At this point the weather turns and I'm momentarily distracted as rain races up the long 'screen. On the long blast from Bergwerk to the famous Karussell, the skies darken and the track stretches ahead like a dark, glazed serpent.



*'The track continues to dive, twist and turn,
and the Birdcage just begs to go faster'*

There's no Porsche RS60 to chase or slow DB coupés to block the Birdcage's rapid path, but the view here is as authentic as it gets on any historic circuit. The wheelarches tower at the sides of the bonnet, that distinctive blue Camoradi stripe flows over the right of the offset power bulge and dirty spray curls around the Birdcage's distinctive humps and bumps. The bodywork of chassis 2461 has long been renewed since that heroic day on 22 May 1960, but it's easy to conjure the moment when the oil feed failed, and I glance to the floor for any signs of invading lubrication.

The track might have dried out for Moss in his second relentless stint to the chequer, when he set the race's fastest lap of 9 mins 37 secs, but you have to drive the Nordschleife to appreciate his 88.34mph average. Consider that the 'screen was smeared with oil and the floor and pedals were perilously slippery with the same, and that achievement is even more incredible. Remember, too, that our hero's mid-race break

had been disturbed by a huge fire in the Ferrari pits. In one of the biggest blazes seen in motor racing, Moss charged forward and helped Giorgio Scarlatti douse his fiery racing overalls before he took over for the last 250 miles. As Gurney observed, Moss was a fantastic athlete.

Through Wippermann, a flat, blind right that's regarded by real racers as the 'Ring's most exciting bend, my pace is cautious. If your knuckles don't turn white here, they say, you're not trying. The rain has relented by now, proving the Nordschleife's reputation for several climates during just one lap. But not even dense fog could deter Gurney and Moss.

The track continues to dive, twist and turn, and the Birdcage just begs to go even faster. The lightness of the steering, brakes and gearchange continue to inspire all the way to the long, flat-out straight. Through the mini-Karussell the driveline chunters over the rough surface, warning that my gear is too high and my pace too slow. I snick the lever back,

the exhaust bellows louder and, with addictive, back-slamming punch, the Birdcage charges out of the banked gully.

There's no question that this was the last word in front-engined sports-racing cars. Its race career was erratic, but luck was never on Maserati's side. Before the British mid-engined revolution took a stranglehold, the Camoradi team returned to the 'Ring and Masten Gregory and the patron, Lloyd 'Lucky' Casner, chalked up another win in the 1000km against all odds.

Built to a price, using redundant 250F and 300S spares in an ingenious spaceframe, Alfieri's Tipo 61 was the last great racing Maserati. I can't imagine a more appropriate place to test its brilliant character than the challenging Nordschleife, where it is easy to appreciate why they are so prized for historic racing. The ongoing development of D-types and Listers has overshadowed its brilliance today, but with a top driver, there's still nothing other than a Cooper Monaco to touch it. 

**‘UNLEASH THE
BELLOWING
CAVALLI, ALL
440 OF THEM’**



Red tape kept Maserati's stonking
Group 4 Bora away from Le Mans,
but it could have been a real
contender at the 24 Hours

WORDS **MARC SONNERY** PHOTOGRAPHY **WARM-UP PHOTO**



By the early 1970s, motorsport was a distant memory inside the tall and bleak Maserati factory. The remnants of the previous effort, the Formula One Cooper-Maseratis, were gathering dust elsewhere when Jean Thépenier, the French importer, made an unexpected request for a pair of racing Boras to take to Le Mans and on the Tour de France.

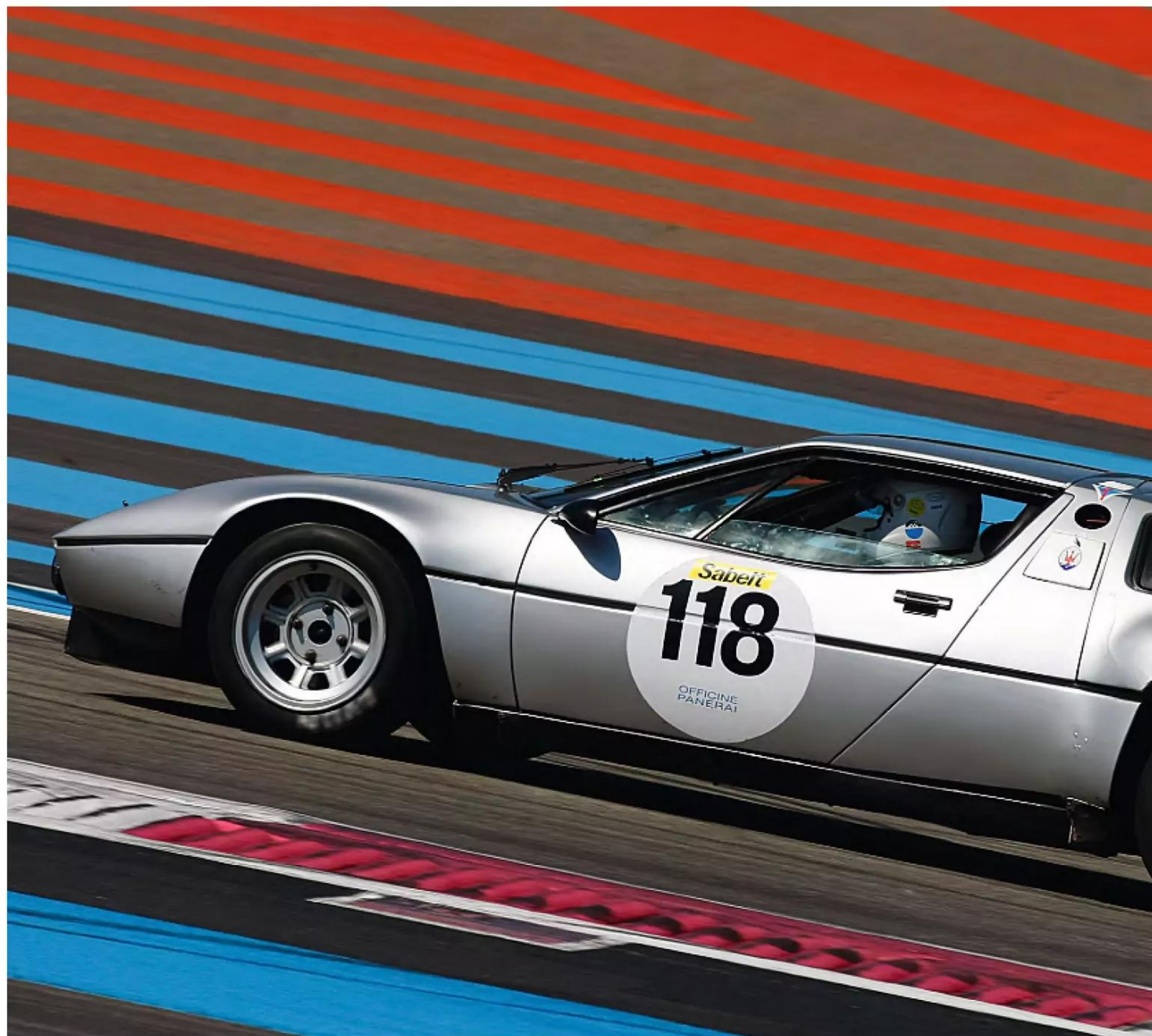
Guy Malleret, then Citroën's man in charge at Viale Ciro Menotti, wasn't quite sure what to make of this demand. Faced with Thépenier's passionate insistence Malleret relented, but not before specifying in a letter to the importer that this was to be a strictly privateer effort, and not to be portrayed in any way as an official factory entry.

Thus, two Group 4-spec Boras were built in 1972-'73: chassis AM117.3000 and AM117.3001. This was a bold step, because none of the new generation of Modenese sports cars – those with their *motore* in the back – had ever been raced. Ferruccio Lamborghini's Miura lacked rigidity, Alejandro de Tomaso's Mangusta had a 70% rearward weight bias and Enzo Ferrari's 365GT4 BB, with its engine perched high atop the gearbox, proved to be ill-handling and only became competitive much later as the BB LM. The De Tomaso Pantera would eventually be a viable Group 4 proposition, although thanks more to its grunt than its dynamic abilities.

The Bora, however, was by far the best-handling of its ilk. It had a non-threatening character at the limit, artfully sorted according to *ingegnere* Giulio Alfieri's vision, with initial understeer turning into predictable oversteer in competent hands. The late Alfieri, speaking in 1995, reflected on the workload at Maserati during the early '70s: "These racers were a big project. The two were [essentially] the same, but the first was a little different, particularly with the body and the suspension geometry. The biggest difficulty was the transformation of the body to accept the big wheels."

Starting with two standard Boras, the factory's tiny R&D department, led by chief technician Cleto Grandi, started the vital task of shedding weight. Superfluous luxury equipment – of which the Bora, as a GT rather than a sports car, had plenty – was culled as the Maserati lost 400 from its original 1650kg. The pop-up headlights made way for fixed, covered items, steel for alloy and glass for Plexiglas, plus the chassis and panels were systematically drilled wherever rigidity allowed. The single most spectacular loss, however, was 100kg for the engine cover – which was singled out for attention after one blew off at Monza.

Starting with a dry-sumped, 4.9-litre block, engineers added four 46IDA Webers, a 42mm-diameter bespoke exhaust and an oil cooler assisted by two small fans. Power was up from 320 to 383bhp, but would later reach 428bhp with the addition of 50IDAs, high-compression pistons and Ghibli 4.9 camshafts, plus improved intake and exhaust manifolds. The brakes, after a review of what Ferrari fitted on its Group 4 Daytonas, consisted of big discs and Girling calipers – as worn by the Lola T70 MkIIIB and Ferrari 512M – but retaining the Citroën hydraulic power assistance. From beefed-up suspension pick-up points and hubs,



stiffer springs and Koni shock absorbers hung fat Campagnolo rims shod with 11in, 26-15 Michelins up front and 13in, 35-15s to the rear. Other than wider wheelarches to accommodate those gargantuan new tyres, the body had no modifications, and no spoilers were fitted.

First to drive '3000', the completed Group 4 Bora, was former Le Mans winner Paul Frère. The motoring journalist carried out a number of tests for Alfieri, ostensibly for articles but in reality to help the great *ingegnere* get around the increasingly contrary attitude of factory tester Guerrino Bertocchi, who remained stuck in the leaf-sprung era and was averse to mid-mounted engines. Despite having gear ratios more suited to faster circuits, the Bora's raw potential impressed the Belgian around the tight Modena Aerautodromo. It was clear that the oil cooling needed to be improved, and Frère's comments about an excessively stiff back end were duly noted, with a thinner rear anti-roll bar improving lap times.

An unscheduled test soon afterwards by *Signor* Azelio Cappi, head of the *sala motore* (engine dyno room), who wanted to see for himself how the car ran, ended in the scenery with considerable damage to the Bora's nose. It was soon sorted, in time for French driver-journalist José Rosinski to sample the car for Gallic magazine *Sport Auto* at Le Mans' small Bugatti circuit. After being driven around by Frenchman François Migault, Thépenier's chosen driver for the 24 Hours, and once he had got used to the sensitive yet powerful brakes, Rosinski was impressed by its solid, user-friendly competence.

How did it fare against the opposition? At a Monza test day, Migault outpaced Group 4 Daytonas – "We really had them worried," he says – with the advantage compounded by the Maranello charger's notorious brake fade, which allowed the Bora to brake far later thanks to its Citroën system's consistency. "Our car always braked at the same spot," recalls

Muscular wheelarches cover vast, 11in-wide front and 13in rear tyres. Below left: the interior remains civilised; 3000 is one of two Group 4 Boras built

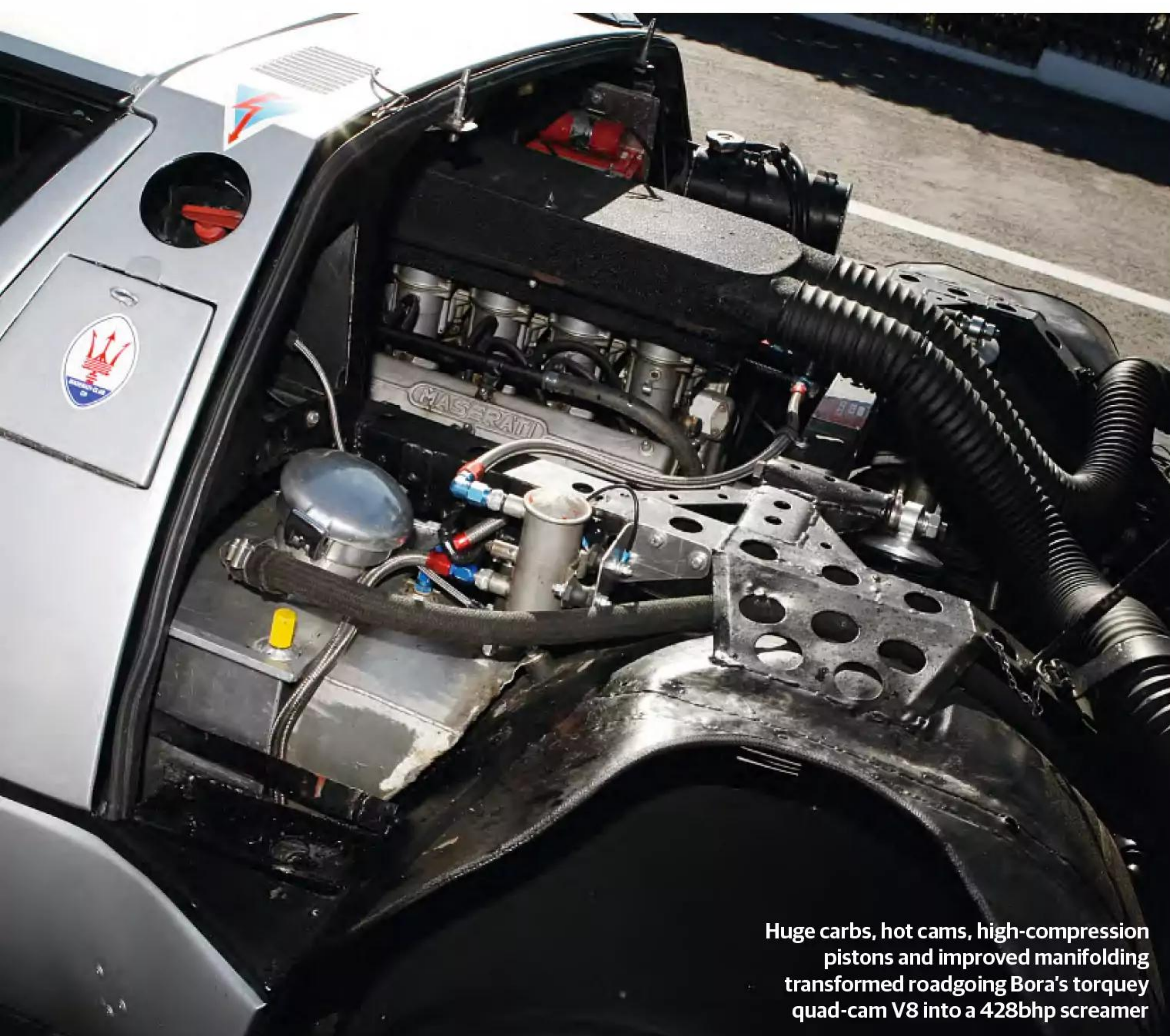


'At Monza, Migault outpaced the Group 4 Daytona, the Citroën system allowing the Bora to brake later'

Cleto Grandi, "whereas the Ferraris braked earlier and earlier the more they ran." With the Bora's torque by then exceeding 360lb ft, Migault adjusted his driving style to brake a touch earlier and exploit the car's grunt on the exit. Guy Ligier, then collaborating with Citroën-Maserati by using SM engines in his JS2, also sampled the Bora, while Jean-Pierre Jaussaud, a future double winner at Le Mans, was selected as the team's second driver.

The entries were filed for the 24 Hours in 1973, then everything began to unravel. First, GT homologation required a minimum of 500 cars to be produced per annum, a figure the Bora could not achieve. According to Cleto, what blocked *omologazione* at that point was not the rumoured political opposition by Ferrari, concerned about the potential of its rival from up the road, but the refusal by Maserati's Citroën management to be creative with the truth in the great Italian motorsport tradition: the risk of a loss of face for Maserati in case of a protest by rival manufacturers was not an option. There was, however, special dispensation from the organisers of the Tour de France, who were keen to see these impressive beasts take part and agreed to let the Boras race in the event's prototype class.

But more bad news was to come as Migault, returning home late at night after a day of Tour de France reconnaissance in a standard Bora, was involved in a nasty accident and suffered a broken knee when a drunk driver pulled out in front of him. As if that wasn't enough, Thépenier's business partner then vanished with the team's budget: the plucky outfit's racing career was over before it had even had a chance to begin. Migault tried to put together a programme for the Bora to race in the USA. Maserati importer Bob Grossman, himself a former driver, was keen to get involved to boost local sales, but it all came to nought. Thépenier's financial difficulties spiralled further downhill and into bankruptcy, and one of his backers, Frenchman Philippe Cornet Epinat, took ownership of chassis 3000.



Huge carbs, hot cams, high-compression pistons and improved manifolding transformed roadgoing Bora's torquy quad-cam V8 into a 428bhp screamer



Bora mates sweet handling with huge grip – losing the engine cover saved 100kg. Below, from left: Marc meets François Migault; Alfieri (on right) unveils Bora at Modena

With its completion by then no longer a priority, 3001 was not ready until August 1973. Thépenier was neither in the position nor any mood to pay, so it was sold – still unused – to a buyer in Saudi Arabia, where it sat idle apart from the odd outing on the beach. It was freed from this fate by US enthusiast and connoisseur Bob Rubin, who took it home to Long Island, New York, and repainted it silver, before finances made him reconsider the restoration and sell it to Marseilles dealer Jean Guikas.

The Bora was cosmetically sound but in need of a rebuild, which was completed in 1991 by Simon de Lautour and his team at Paul Ricard. Jean campaigned 3001 on the 1993 Tour Auto with compatriot François Fabre who, despite not being comfortable with the brakes in the wet, bought the car after the event. In contrast to 3000, which has led an eventful life, 3001 remains largely original, down to its powered brakes and Le Mans door-number lights.

Back to 3000, and in the early 1980s Cornet Epinat repainted the car red, had the engine detuned and began to use it on the road around Paris, plus once for a track day at Dijon-Prenois. Then a schoolboy, I used to see 3000 every morning as my bus passed Thépenier's premises, and I often visited the showroom. Its nose had met a kerb and the grille trident had become a 'bident'. I asked to buy the last such insignia to adorn a racing Maserati for a long time and the badge was removed, but – typical teenager – I never collected it, and to this day no new crest has been fitted.

In 1996, diehard Maserati enthusiast Jean once again appeared in the Group 4 Bora story when he bought 3000 from Cornet Epinat. "It was still painted red and the engine barely eked out 300bhp," recalls Jean, "so I hardly used it. Then in 1999 the Ferrari Challenge became the Ferrari-Maserati Challenge. I asked Ferrari if



it was eligible and it was, so I raced in 1999 at Spa with the detuned engine and came fourth behind the Group 4 Daytona of Carlos Monteverde. Back from Spa, my mechanic, Bertholon, rebuilt the motor to the original specification – you could then pull 7200rpm." That's significantly higher than the notoriously low-revving 'street' version, for which 5500rpm is the limit with occasional bursts to 6200rpm. An additional radiator was also fitted at that point to improve cooling.

Jean then took 3000 to the Nürburgring, where he led early on and finished third, then he won both heats of that year's Vallenga finale. Naysayers were silenced, history was avenged and a Swiss-German gentleman driver, Dominick Ellenrieder, begged Jean to sell him the car. Ellenrieder had it further tuned and removed the Citroën assistance, with the unfortunate result that he crashed first time out, on the first corner of the first lap. Once repaired, 3000 was used sporadically before being traded back to Jean in 2004 against an ex-Scuderia Filipinetti 275GTB/4. Since then the car has used a replacement engine brought up to race spec – Jean still owns the original motor and will one day get it rebuilt.



A crash in a Ferrari on the 2004 Tour Auto took Jean out of action, and 3000 was put away in his cavernous garage. "In 2007, Ferrari wanted the car to race again and contacted me," he recalls. "I took it to the Bugatti circuit at Le Mans, but, having not driven it since 1999 and buying it back with its modifications, I realised that it did not brake at all. The engine ran well, but the rear suspension was too soft and I had an 'off' – the traces of which are still visible – but somehow qualified fifth. In the Saturday race I was fourth, but on Sunday it rained and I won easily. The lack of brakes was not a handicap in the wet, and despite the eight-year-old rain-cut tyres, the competence of the Bora allowed me to win with a 22-second lead. It is quite an extraordinary car in the wet."

The car then languished in Jean's collection in Marseilles until 2009, when he fitted an adapted servo and some more appropriate rear springs ahead of our testing session at Paul Ricard High Tech Test Track.

There is no time to get misty-eyed over the momentous occasion of driving the car I used to gawp at in Thépenier's showroom all those years ago, because the light is green and we only have an hour of track time. Jean does a few

laps to ensure that all is as it should be, then it's my turn to wedge myself in. The bucket seat holds you in place well enough, but it sits noticeably higher than the unusually long shell seats of the road version, which extend to below your knees. Here, it puts your helmet uncomfortably close to the rollcage bar that runs along the top of the windscreen, with your knees bent to the pedals even with the seat set back in its rearmost position.

The steering column is hidden by the ovoid shroud from a Citroën SM – early examples of the Bora's V6-engined little sister Merak used SM dashboards – and the other unexpected sight is a leather gaiter on the gearlever. The gate beneath remains unchanged: first to the left and back on a dog-leg, then second to fifth in a conventional 'H' pattern. The brake pedal sits higher than the throttle, which François – who has joined us to share his memories – says was not the case in period. Oh and yes, he was able to heel-and-toe with the Citroën system.

The dash is well laid out, with even a gearbox oil temperature gauge and the rev counter moved to the right into the spot occupied by the speedometer on road cars. The latter has been relocated to the bottom of the centre console rather than being deleted entirely, its presence explained by the need to avoid penalties during public-road sections on the Tour de France. It is quite impractical to look at down there, though, so I am far too busy to even see if it works.

Flick the plethora of ignition cut-off switches to 'On', push the starter and the V8 wakes with a mighty but not overbearing rumble. The sound has a lot of presence in the pits, yet even without earplugs it never gets excessively loud on the track. As it eases out of the pitlane for an exploratory lap, the Bora feels surprisingly placid: the clutch is not too heavy and the ZF gearchange requires precision but is aided by



Crude wheelarch chop. Right: 3000 in the mid-1980s

RICARD RELOADED

Built in 1970 by the eponymous drinks maker, Paul Ricard has always been a great circuit for both drivers and spectators. After the death of its founder in 1997, the track was bought by Excelis, which carried out extensive modernisation to relaunch the venue as the High Technology Test Track in 2002. New concepts in safety included abrasive asphalt run-off areas in place of gravel traps (below right) and Tecpro barriers instead of traditional tyre walls.

Homologated by the FIA in 2006, Paul Ricard HTTT became a safety reference point. After a change in management, 5000 grandstand seats were built over the winter of 2008-'09, and the first public event was the launch of the 2009 Le Mans Series on 8 March. In November came the Grand Prix Historique de Provence, organised by Patrick Quiniou. Safe and low-stress yet still exciting to drive, Paul Ricard is ideal for classics at events such as the 100 Tours du Castellet in March and the V de V races in April. It is also regularly used for club track days.



a good linkage that makes it neither heavy nor slow. The steering is light, not the most direct, but accurate, and the quad-cam motor's torque peaks noticeably higher up the rev range than in its more docile roadgoing twin. It's at its best from 4000-7000rpm; below that the hot cams tend to bog the engine down.

After a couple laps of familiarisation, both with the controls and the vast, flat surroundings – the old Nürburgring or Cadwell Park this is not – there is a chance to explore the potential

of this mysterious chapter in Modenese history. The pliant nature of the chassis, allied to the huge increase in agility generated by the large weight loss, are obvious within the first couple of bends. Decide to turn in and it obeys immediately; adjust your line mid-corner, even clumsily, and it remains unmoved, planted like a sumo wrestler, daring you to push it harder. Through the Beausset double right-hander it is perfectly poised, with masses of grip from the combination of perfectly tuned suspension and sticky Avons giving the confidence to unleash the bellowing *cavalli* earlier and earlier, all 420-440 of them.

The new brakes have an initial dead spot, then they bite hard and become easy to modulate. Press the middle pedal firmly and you sense a distinct weight transfer that would demand caution when braking under steering loads or in the wet. Rosinski mentioned the nose getting light at speed, but on the Mistral Straight it feels secure.

There have been any number of rule-bending racers that should never have been allowed to compete, so it is a tragedy that we were deprived the sight of a winning trident at Le Mans. The Group 4 Bora is a compelling case of 'what might have been' and a quintessential example of the misfortune that dogged Maserati's racing history. Ultimately, the gear ratios are too tall for the short track we are using today, but it's easy to imagine what a formidable weapon this car would have been at Spa or Le Mans and the alarm it would have caused Panteras, Daytonas and 911s as it roared up in their mirrors. With good reason. It's no surprise, then, that Jean is reluctant to part with the Bora and is already looking ahead to the next Le Mans Classic.

Thanks to Jean Guikas (guikasgtrc.fr), Stand 21 and Ermanno Cozza of Maserati SpA. Marc Sonnery's book, *Maserati: the Citroën years 1968-1975*, is published by Parker House



A sight that would have struck fear into Group 4 Ferrari Daytona drivers

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A photograph of the front of a silver Maserati A6G/54 sports car. The car is positioned on a dark, gravelly surface, possibly a road or track. The background shows a landscape with trees and hills under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The car's front features a prominent grille with the Maserati trident logo, a round headlight, and a license plate that reads '54 DNO'.

‘This sleek, compact
exotic stands out
like a supermodel
in a crowd’

Maserati's sublime A6G/54 was tailor-made for the Italian *gentiluomo* racer's competitive needs, but this stunning Zagato creation makes for a sensational GT

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



Private underground city car parks conceal some amazing secret motors, but few are as surprising as this early-1950s Maserati coupé. As we drop down to the basement-level storage facility, the lift doors open to reveal a subtle grey, Zagato-bodied beauty conspicuously placed among bland moderns. Even beneath the sterile neon glow of its stark hideaway, this sleek, compact exotic stands out like a pert supermodel in a crowd. Amazingly, there are no barriers to protect its delicate, hand-formed aluminium body, and you can't help feeling that this rare 1954 GT should be displayed across the river in the Tate Gallery.

Ugo Zagato's team of artisans at the Via Arese works in Milan had a great eye for natural form and pretty much defined the classic coupé look in the early 1950s. None of the 20 Zagatos were identical because details and trim continually evolved and just one chassis, 2121, had the signature 'double bubble' roof. "Great designs don't come from wanting to produce a good shape," Zagato claimed, "they come from making cars faster and more intelligent." The

house of Zagato may have lost that defining 'Grinta e Sportività' purity in its later years, but the only route for the Italian gentleman racer in the early '50s was via the famous Milanese *carrozzeria*. Rivals Allemano and Frua both bodied the updated 2-litre coupé between 1954 and '57, but none of the 40 built matched Zagato's seductive fastback.

The owner of this twin-cam, straight-six jewel – the only 2000GT in the UK – has generously entrusted me to deliver the car solo from London to respected Norfolk-based Maserati specialist Steve Hart for its annual service. And there are few more dramatic places to start up the Vittorio Bellentani-revised 160bhp straight-six than a silent underground car park. Twist the key, push the button and this thoroughbred heart – with chain-driven cams and triple Webers – barks instantly into life. The throaty exhaust boldly fills its concrete-walled lair. Close your eyes and it could be a 250F revving up in a Monza pit garage. Once the engine is warm, I point the car's shapely snout towards the ramp, and can't resist stretching the revs in first gear as it heads up to the barrier. The strident howl sounds even richer around the narrow tunnel. Out into



Clockwise from main:
A6G/54 has wonderful
cornering balance;
twin-plug dohc 'six' with
crackle-black cam covers
and triple Webers; spare
fills boot, but there's
room for soft bags at
the sides; pert tail

the Sunday night city traffic, the Maserati soon gets approving interest, none more so than from a Ducati rider who follows me for miles. He pulls alongside at every set of lights and soaks up its alluring shape and boisterous tone. Well, I'd do the same, because the chances of seeing another like this on British roads are minimal. Even in the 1950s these Maserati *gran turismos* were mainly sold in Italy, where wealthy owners battled with rival Lancia Aurelias, Fiat 8Vs and Alfa 1900SS Zagatos for the popular GT championship.

Out on to a deserted dual carriageway, the 2000GT – better known as the A6G/54 – starts to come alive. The gearbox, via the tall alloy-ball-topped lever, is a treat to work, with a rewarding mechanical feel as you slice through the gate, while the steering's initial deadness transforms into a silky, precise action at higher speeds. You sense that the handling is beautifully neutral on clear roundabouts, as the 'six' delivers strong, smooth punch. You need no excuse to hold the revs right to 5000rpm through the gears for the buzz from that addictive yowl as the chassis holds its line neatly.

It's not crying wolf, either: this 1954 GT is as quick as it sounds thanks to a healthy power-to-weight ratio, and it will give most hot hatches a challenge up to 80mph. The flat leather seats offer little support, while the low roofline creates a widescreen view of the road; it all adds to the period character. My only concern is the lack of outside mirrors, as the suspension crashes painfully over London's cursed potholed streets.

It's easily the most valuable car ever stashed at my home, so I'm up long before rush hour and the protracted warm-up predictably upsets the neighbours. I choose the North Circular rather than the M25 slog, and again the pre-dawn darkness fuels Mille Miglia fantasies.

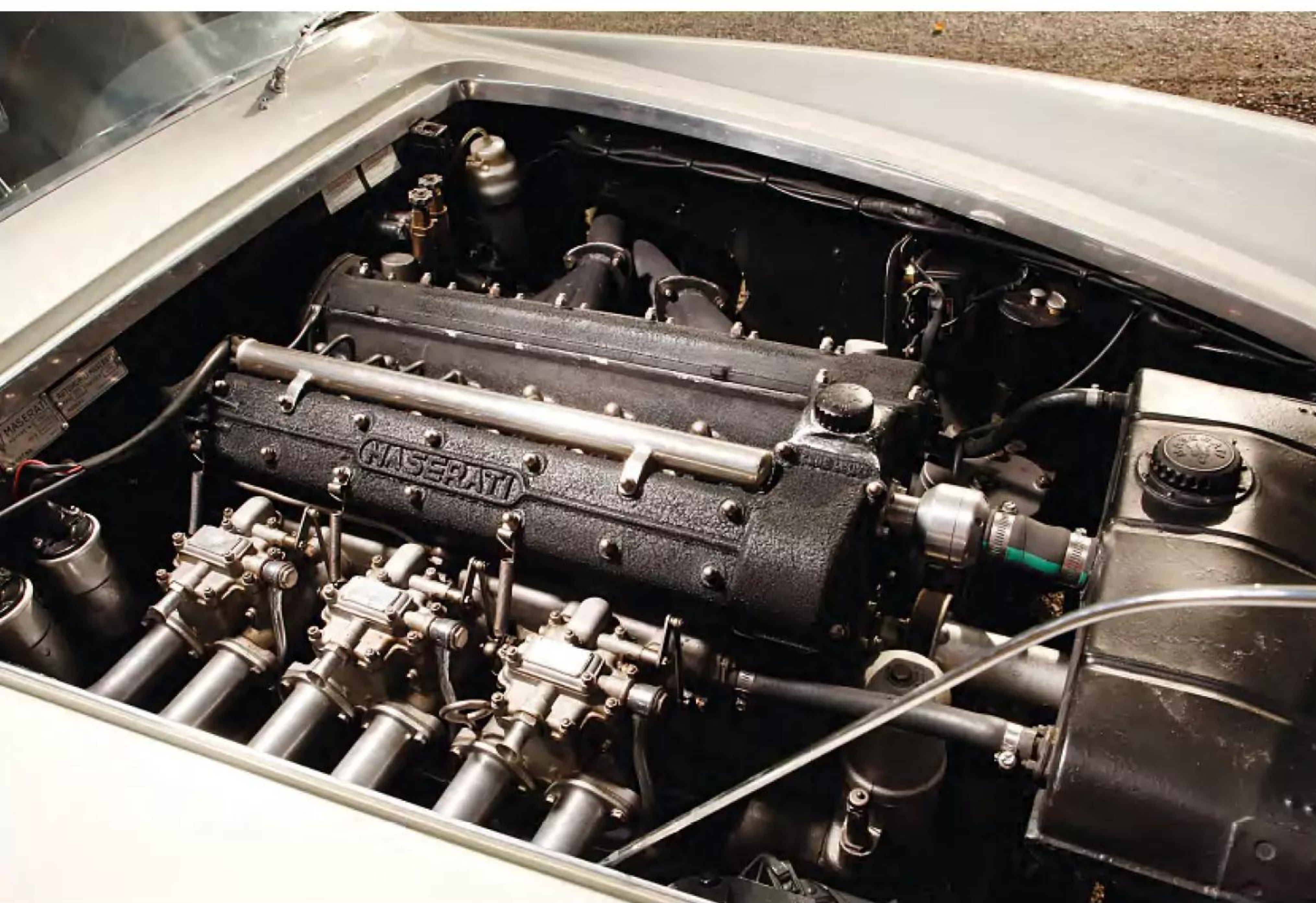
Potholes aside, the ride is surprisingly comfortable, and there's little roll through turns. As I gain confidence with this glorious

machine, the big gap between first and second becomes more apparent, but more disturbingly – as the early daylight fills the Spartan cockpit – I note that the oil-pressure gauge needle regularly fluctuates. Thankfully, I later learn that it's only the relief valve that causes this worrying symptom. The cabin is pretty minimal but better fitted-out than most competition Ferraris, with the bold Jaeger speedometer and rev counter dominating the layout behind the classic three-spoke Nardi steering wheel. The interior door trim is enhanced by delicate aluminium handles, while the headlining is leather. Italian gentlemen clearly demanded a certain refinement for their drive to events.

By dawn, having diverted off the A1(M), I'm out on familiar Hertfordshire roads, and once more the car's inspiring balance rewards as it blasts through some favourite bends. Only sleepy wildfowl worry my press-on pace – not even the Maserati's searing charge stirs them – and I'm relieved to reach wider roads. Fortunately, the brakes are strong: there's no hint of pull or locking up, while the pedal itself is reassuringly firm in its action.

Over breakfast at Duxford I review the history file. Like several A6G 2000s, chassis 2118 was sold through the Rome Maserati dealership of Guglielmo 'Mimmo' Dei, who later launched Scuderia Centro Sud. Finished in ivory, with stylish blue trim, the car was sold to hotshoe Luigi Musso's brother Giuseppe in January 1956. Musso never competed in the car, but Dei drove it at the Corse Lanciato hillclimb and possibly several other events. The following year, 2118 was sold to Count Maggi Diligente, who ran a property business in Milan. Diligente was clearly a Trident fan, because he also owned the fabulous A6GCS Pinin Farina Berlinetta.

Diligente crashed the car while competing in the 1957 Coppa della Consuma, and it went back to the factory for repair. Both ends were



MASERATI 2000GT A6G/54

Sold/number built 1954-'57/60 (20 Zagatos)

Construction steel tubular ladder chassis, aluminium body

Engine all-alloy, dohc 1986cc straight-six with two valves per cylinder, twin-plug ignition and triple Weber 40DCO3 carburetors

Max power 160bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque n/a

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, quarter-elliptic leaf springs; Houdaille lever-arm dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering worm and sector

Brakes finned drums

Length 13ft 5in (4089mm)

Width 5ft 1/4in (1530mm)

Height 4ft 4in (1321mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 4in (2540mm)

Weight 1800lb (816kg)

0-60mph 8 secs

Top speed 130mph **Mpg** n/a

Price new £3200

crunched in the spin – those hillclimb road courses left little room for error. The invoice details two new wheels, electrical work, a front suspension rebuild and a radiator, as well as the bodywork. The repairs took close to three months, and Diligente must have been shocked by the 700,000-lire bill. With his firm already in financial difficulties, Diligente had no option but to sell the Zagato. At that point 2118 was renumbered 2189, possibly to match its new engine or just to sway the next customer that the car was mostly new. Still painted grey, 2118/2189 continued racing with third owner Vincenzo Ossi, mainly in Italian hillclimbs including the Bologna to San Luca event, at which it came seventh in class.

The car then had a succession of Latin owners before it ended up in Sicily, where it stayed for 14 years with Luigi Manzumi. From 1973, a lady doctor drove the sleek Maserati around Rome, after which it went to Charles Reid in the USA. Eventually, New York collector Sam Mann acquired the car and during its restoration had the body repainted red. Subsequent owners included such discerning enthusiasts as Skip Barbour and William ‘Chip’ Connor. The car then returned to Europe, where its following German keeper had the prudence to return the bodywork to its original colour. After a renovation by Conulato in Italy, 2118/2189 successfully completed the Mille Miglia. Luckily for British Maserati fans, this fabulous coupé was next sold to a UK enthusiast – who loves driving it. As well as starring at last year’s International Maserati Club Rally at Goodwood, the Zagato has regularly been driven on European road-trips including to the owner’s wedding in France. Well, wouldn’t you?

Fans of the A6G/54 coupés included Denis ‘Jenks’ Jenkinson. *Motor Sport*’s ‘continental correspondent’ called at Maserati’s Modena works on the way back from Sicily in 1956 to pick up a Mille Miglia practice car for co-driver Moss. The situation at the factory couldn’t have been further removed from the slick, efficient preparations of the previous year at Mercedes-Benz. ‘In every corner of the works were sports Maseratis in various stages of repair and disrepair,’ reported the bearded scribe. ‘There were 2-litre A6G, 1½-litre 150S, 3-litre 300S and 2-litre 200S models varying from a bare chassis frame to a complete car. Rows of engines were being assembled; others were on the test-beds being run-in or power-tested. The activity was obviously going to go on all day and night.’

This colourful description conjures perfectly the chaotic atmosphere at Maserati, which had too many commitments stretching the accommodating team. Had it focused on the works racers, the results would have been far better. Predictably, Jenks’ new 350S wasn’t ready for testing, so Francesco Giardini offered him the only available car: a once-pretty Zagato A6G coupé ‘that was now very weary and dirty-looking having just completed seven laps of the Mille Miglia in various hands’. Chief mechanic Guerino Bertocchi drove Jenks out to Modena autodrome in the coupé on a wet Sunday morning and proceeded to blast around for four fast laps to check that everything was in order before waving him off to collect Moss from Milan. Jenks adored the little Maserati’s ‘light and positive steering’ and its ‘lovely’ gearchange. The roadholding was so good that



Clockwise from top left: superb Maserati set in Steve Hart’s workshop, with Tipo 151 alongside A6G/54, Alfa TZ1 at front; delectable profile defined the 1950s GT look; taut shape with Borrani wires filling the wheelarches



Sparse interior with broad Nardi wheel, large Jaeger instruments and delicate door fittings



Pop-out doorhandle.
Below: on '58 Varese-
Campo dei Fiori hillclimb



WALTER BÄUMER

it was 'difficult to reach anywhere near the limit', while the engine was 'so lively that an eye had to be kept on the rev-counter to avoid going over the 5500rpm limit'. Jenks reluctantly gave the car to Moss at the airport, but the only consolation was to see how well it could really go. During their recce, Jenks calculated that the 2-litre Maserati set a higher average than the 130mph 300SL test car in 1955. He wrote: 'Without exceeding 5500rpm (98mph), the Maserati was so much more manageable. It could be flicked from side to side of the road with the minimum of effort, and in and out of the traffic with little space required while the gearbox would keep the revs up.' After one 1000-mile lap, they arrived back at the factory having 'developed a great regard' for the A6G. Such was their pace on the open roads, Jenks calculated that they'd have finished third in the previous year's 2-litre class. Both wanted to take the car for another lap's practice, but it had to be prepared for a privateer, with a new engine, gearbox and rear axle!

There are few hills on our route, yet it's easy to relate to Jenks' vivid report. The brakes and steering never fail to inspire, while the sure-footed handling encourages ever-faster runs

through long, open sweepers. Not once does it feel unsettled. The sun is setting fast by the time we arrive at Steve Hart's workshop – tucked away down a West Dereham back-lane – but I could have driven long into the night. Inside this isolated unit is a Trident treasure-trove. As well as several 'Birdcages', including the ex-Gregory/Daigh Camoradi 1960 Le Mans streamliner, there's the dramatic remains of the last racing coupé, the Tipo 151.

Steve enjoys working on all classic Maseratis, particularly the A6Gs. He says: "They are beautifully made and the front suspension design carried right through to the 250F and 450S. The synchromesh is weak, and the gap between first and second can be frustrating on the track, but it's fine on the road. With around 160bhp in such a light car, it's no surprise that the performance is so strong."

It's a real wrench to leave the A6G and Steve's fascinating workshop. Driving home in a soulless modern, I miss the Maserati's raucous exhaust and the cold alloy of its chunky gearlever. As we head south, a magnificent sunset bathes the Fens. Imagining that fading orange light kissing those sleek, handcrafted Zagato curves is almost too much.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Gorgeous drop-tops such as the Frua-styled A6GCS helped turn Maserati into hot property as it made the life-saving shift from track to road

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **KIDSTON SA**







Fabulous painted dashboard matched the body colour, and there's no forgetting the coachbuilder because Frua's signature litters the cabin. The stubby gearlever hints at the A6's racing origins



'The plan was to create Maserati's most seductive roadster, to upstage anything from Maranello, and it didn't disappoint'

For the wealthy young Italian in the 1950s, a bespoke coupé was usually the preferred choice for chic motoring; no element of their debonair style would be ruffled, as long as they could stay cool in the summer heat. Open cars were created for motorsport or California export, often instigated by clever dealers such as leading light John von Neumann.

Maserati had focused primarily on racing, but after the war it needed to find further income so began offering detuned, coachbuilt road cars, starting with the A6-1500 GT. Yet somehow these early street machines didn't encapsulate the soul of the Trident badge. Aided by the addition to the design team of the great engineer Gioacchino Colombo, the specification and performance improved hand in hand with racing developments. In 1953, along with a new 2-litre straight-six engine came a magnificent range of handbuilt machines for road and track. Once again, the tin-top *gran turismo* market was the main focus, but Rome-based Maserati dealer Guglielmo 'Mimmo' Dei had other ideas – and they resulted in the fabulous Frua-bodied roadster pictured here. Just two matching cars were built, and this red-and-ivory beauty, chassis 2109, was the first and the most desirable.

Born in 1909, Dei was an amateur competitor

during the late '30s, and after WW2 his contacts with Maserati led to him opening a dealership in Rome. Although motorsport was his great passion, later motivating him to found the Scuderia Centro Sud team and racing school, Dei instigated some of the most beautiful 2-litre Maserati road cars. Frua was Dei's *carrozzeria* of choice, and when the firm created a sleek, aggressive *berlinetta* on the A6G-2000, he had the idea of creating a more glamorous open model. In late 1954 Zagato also had a go at a spider version of the A6G-2000, but the result was no match for Frua's effort and it remained unsold at the factory for more than three years.

Pietro Frua's great eye for style no doubt came from his father, who was a respected tailor in Turin. His automotive work began aged just 17 as a draughtsman at Stabilimenti Farina, where he later gave a young Giovanni Michelotti a job before leaving to start his own studio in 1938. Maserati was one of Frua's first clients, a connection that continued to the '70s.

When Dei organised the delivery of two race-tuned A6GCS chassis to Frua's Turin workshop in early 1955, the plan was to create Maserati's most seductive roadster, to upstage anything from Maranello, and the talented designer did not disappoint. Dei's Rome showroom was struggling with financial challenges, and he was already hatching plans to relocate to Modena and switch to running a racing operation, but his final road-car

'The sight of the gorgeous red sports car parading its precious cargo for a lap of the track no doubt lifted spirits'



Maserati ace Jean Behra prepares to chauffeur new Italian President Giovanni Gronchi (right) at the '55 Italian Grand Prix debut of the A6GCS





project would be his most spectacular. There was nowhere better to give the exotic new roadster a debut than at Italy's most famous motorsport weekend, with the world's press cameras focused on a stage far more exciting than that of any motor show.

The reopening of the newly rebuilt Monza race circuit for the Italian Grand Prix on 11 September 1955 was a big day. More than 100,000 fans packed into the autodrome near Milan, all excited to see the reconstructed high-speed banking: it hadn't been used since 1933 and had been bombed badly during the war. Among the important dignitaries invited to the event was Giovanni Gronchi, the newly elected President of the Italian Republic.

A very special car was needed to drive the co-founder of the Christian Democracy party around the circuit, and Dei had just the machine: a striking, lipstick-red roadster that had just been completed by the Carrozzeria Frua workshops. To compete on its home soil,

the Maserati works team had also entered a unique 250F streamliner for its star driver, Jean Behra, in a vain attempt to catch the dominant Mercedes-Benz Silver Arrows.

In the bright September sunshine, the sensational Maserati drop-top dazzled all who viewed it on the main pit straight, where its low, compact form contrasted with the more formal coachbuilt cars being readied to carry VIP guests including the cardinal of the Milan *duomo*. After introductions to all of the drivers, Gronchi was escorted to the passenger seat of the Maserati, with the French ace Behra nominated as chauffeur. 'Jeannot' was having a frustrating time with the streamlined 250F, which had proved no quicker than the standard open-wheeled racer and was well off the pace of the Mercedes-Benz stars, but at least he hadn't had the scares of the Ferrari team, with several high-speed tyre blowouts.

Wearing his signature suede jacket and Suixtil sports shirt, Behra's casual style

contrasted with the suited President as they climbed into the ivory-leather bucket seats that matched the bonnet flash. After some small talk – Behra could speak basic Italian – the raucous twin-cam 2-litre straight-six was started, and no doubt Gronchi grabbed the door top. To prevent Behra scaring his important passenger, a group of eight motorcycle outriders arrived to lead the red Maserati around the track, with a convoy of important guests following in other special cars. The Italian teams were having a tough time against the streamlined Stuttgart sensations, which had averaged 130mph around the newly completed circuit, but the sight of the gorgeous red sports car parading its precious cargo for a lap of the newly rebuilt circuit must have lifted spirits.

Behra would eventually finish fourth in his misfiring 250F, behind the brave Eugenio Castellotti in the Ferrari Super Squalo, but Maserati's morale was boosted by the news that Mercedes was to withdraw from motorsport, with Stirling Moss set to join the Trident team. The A6GCS can clearly be seen in a short monochrome British Pathé film of the 1955 Italian Grand Prix on YouTube.

That exotic machine was one of just two cabriolets bodied by Frua, with A6GCS chassis 2109 and 2110 dispatched in July 1955 to Carrozzeria Frua in Turin. Both featured full race-specification engines with revised chain-driven camshafts, twin-plug ignition and, most crucially, a dry sump that allowed the talented stylist to create a dramatically low, rakish bonnet line, with the wheelarches cut high into the compact roadster's neat flanks. The boot, which was already packed with a spare wheel and a remote oil tank, was compromised as a result. For that fantasy weekend escape with a dream companion, the luggage would definitely need to be sent ahead.

Other features included Jaeger instruments, Cibié lighting and an Abarth exhaust. The brakes, like the chassis, were competition-bred. Big, drilled drums were clearly visible through the polished Borrani wire wheels and, with radial ribs for cooling, they were beautifully cast and machined. Tautly shaped and almost impossibly sleek, the two cars were near-identical, with an aggressive convex lattice grille, pointed bumper overriders, a low windscreen and a vee-shaped bonnet panel highlighted by ivory paint. To identify the pair they had contrasting colour schemes, with 2109 finished in red and 2110 in a more conservative black. The factory was so pleased with Frua's design that the car featured on the cover of its latest A6G-2000 brochure.

Much of the production was farmed out due to the Trident equipe's hectic schedule, with the chassis produced by Gilco. The extremely rigid design featured large main tubes that swept inwards at the front and up over the rear axle. The front suspension was by unequal-length wishbones, coil springs and an anti-roll bar, with Houdaille lever-arm dampers, while at the

'Unlike in the noisy, hot cockpit of a coupé, the lucky owner could enjoy its pace and strident yowl without arriving for dinner in a sweat'



From top: special boss for Nardi wheel; drilled drum brakes behind Borrani wires; Cibie lights and signature Frua quarter-bumpers; chassis 2109 still proudly wears matching numbers

rear there was a live axle located by quarter-elliptic springs and a system of radius rods with the lower member forming an 'A' under the differential casting in a ball-and-socket joint.

Open the bonnet and it's clear that this elegant roadster has a racing heart. With crackle-black cam covers and triple twin-choke Webers sprouting open trumpets, this all-alloy jewel produces 160bhp at 6000rpm and loves to rev. With the whole car weighing around 840kg, the performance from this sexy 2-litre is as impressive as you'd expect from a competition-based design, with a top speed of 130mph.

From the moment you push the starter, the engine reveals its breeding with a raucous, rasping exhaust sound straight from an early '50s Grand Prix grid. The gearbox is slick, with a precise change, while the sharp worm-and-sector steering is superbly weighted. With a crisp turn-in and that race-bred chassis, the car feels nimble and poised. The brakes are strong and, unlike a contemporary Ferrari, you never wrestle the A6G. The 2-litre 'six' lacks legs on the *autostrada*, but it loves the challenge of a sinuous pass – as the racers proved on the Targa Florio. And, unlike in the noisy, hot cockpit of a Zagato or Pininfarina coupé, the lucky owner could enjoy its performance and strident yowl without arriving for dinner in a sweat.

After its public debut at Monza, chassis 2109 was entered for the eighth Concorso di Eleganza per Autovetture e Autopullman on 22-23 October. The red roadster was driven on to the dramatic Pincio Terrace overlooking Rome by Dei's friend Maria Teresa de Filippis, the aristocratic race ace who would later join the Maserati team.

Due to the high price-tag, Dei had to wait another six months before a wealthy buyer could be tempted. That enthusiast was 21-year-old Vittorio Costantini, who came from Macerata, a lofty town on the east coast of Italy. Costantini must have savoured the great performance and nifty handling of the A6GCS on the local hilly routes up and down to the Adriatic coast, with the roof down and glamorous companions alongside. Happy holiday snaps show Costantini and the Maserati touring all around Italy, including Naples.

As with so many exotic Italian sports cars, the Frua roadster was eventually sold to America, where by the early 1980s it had been secured by Michigan-based collector Tom Mittler. This popular enthusiast indulged his love of Italian classics, historic motorsport and vintage boats, having made his fortune as one of America's largest independent gas suppliers.

The Frua Maserati was meticulously restored to concours condition, but mysteriously the paint finish was changed to black and ivory, the same scheme as its sister car, 2110. The immaculate roadster was given a debut at Pebble Beach in 1992, where it won its class before joining Mittler's other Latin classics including a Ferrari 250GT California and a Maserati 450S-powered hydroplane.

Tragically, Mittler died from a stroke aged just 67 in 2010, and for the following nine years the Maserati remained hidden away on the family estate until it was tracked down by specialist Kidston SA for a European collector. A deal was done and for the first time in nearly six decades, 2109 returned to Italy. Managed by Simon Kidston and Emanuele Collo, the restoration began to return the car to its distinctive original colours. Extensive research on the rare machine was put in by Maserati authority Adolfo Orsi, who has close links to the marque through his grandfather Adolfo and father Omar, who in turn held the company's reins from 1937-'68. The work was carried out by Cremonini Classic, the respected Modena-based specialist.

After the black paint was removed, the body was found to be highly original, with only minor repairs required before it was prepared for a repaint in the original *rosso*. For the mechanical work Kidston enlisted former Maserati man Giuseppe Candini, who joined the racing department in 1954 and worked with Juan Manuel Fangio during his Championship-winning 1957 season. Following a thorough rebuild, the A6GCS now goes as well as it looks. As the only Frua cabriolet still with its factory competition engine, and now at last returned to its original paint scheme as first shown at the Italian Grand Prix, this glorious Maserati is almost guaranteed to be a winner wherever it makes its post-restoration debut.

Maybe the perfect tribute would be to take chassis 2109 back to Monza for a parade at the Italian Grand Prix. But if I were the lucky new owner of this car, I'd be heading to the Amalfi Coast, just as first keeper Costantini did. The sublime style and glorious sound of this beauty blasting through the coastal hairpins between the villages of Positano and Ravello could only be improved by having a glamorous film star in the passenger seat. Well, we can all dream... But this fabulous roadster rarity inspires such fantasies.

Thanks to Simon Kidston and Emanuele Collo at Kidston SA (kidston.com)



Race-bred twin-cam 2-litre 'six' with triple Webers and twin-plug head. Below: striking interior with the ivory leather bucket seats set low in the chassis





TOURING'S GRANDEST TOURERS

Milanese styling and sophisticated pace make the Aston Martin DB4 and Maserati 3500GT natural rivals, but which better fulfils its brief?

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



'The Autocar found that it was capable of 0-100mph and back again inside 30 seconds'



From top: the DB4's flowing profile is more familiar than that of the Maserati and influences Aston Martin design even today; frontal styling would gain faired-in headlights for the later DB5 and DB6

The lady in the burger van was not amused by us using 'her' lay-by as a turning-around space. She clearly couldn't see our photographer Tony Baker skulking in the undergrowth at the exit of the corner further up the road; as far as she was concerned, we were just two middle-aged hooligans in a pair of large and fruity-sounding sports cars who were frightening her customers. After three or four passes, she could stand it no longer. Leaping from the van – red faced, tattooed and flapping aggressively – she waved me down and bawled her obvious displeasure through the carefully adjusted half-inch crack at the top of the driver's window of 'my' Aston Martin DB4.

Calming reassurances about my driving skills and the merit of our artistic endeavour fell upon deaf ears. Eventually, though, she retreated to her sizzling quarter-pounders, muttering something about phoning the law. You'll be glad to hear she didn't ruin my day: with a DB4 and a Maserati 3500GT to play with, it was going to take more than an irate purveyor of roadside fast food to spoil the fun.

The charms of a twin-cam straight-six and svelte Superleggera bodywork may, of course, be lost on some people. Why should a burger van proprietor care that these two large, noisy and pollution-spewing old cars – together currently valued at the price of a large home in a nice part of Surrey – represent just about the ultimate manifestations of true *gran turismo* motoring in the late 1950s and early '60s?



These were machines built to take you across a country – or continent – at sustained three-figure speeds, experiencing a form of travel that was beyond the imagination of most people. They are exemplars of an era when the difference between family cars and true exotica was much greater than it is today. Both were created for a wealthy, specialised market, of course, but they were also designed to be less fragile and finicky than the models they replaced. Neither would ever be commonplace, yet both were produced in surprisingly substantial numbers over several distinct series of development – no fewer than five in the case of the DB4, early examples of which suffered from well-publicised cooling problems. The upshot is that they were cars later generations could realistically dream of owning. The final manifestations of their respective bloodlines – the Maserati Mistral and Aston DB6 – were still available new at the beginning of the 1970s.

The fact that both cars were so crucial to the

long-term survival of their respective manufacturers is another quality that makes the DB4 and 3500GT so eminently comparable. Maserati built only about 100 of its post-war 2-litre road cars, making the 3500 the Trident's first true production model, and there has never been a more important single design in the firm's history. Likewise, the DB4 – the first Aston Martin developed entirely by the David Brown organisation, and the first production car to be shaped by a foreign stylist – is the model that established the template and set the tone for every subsequent Aston.

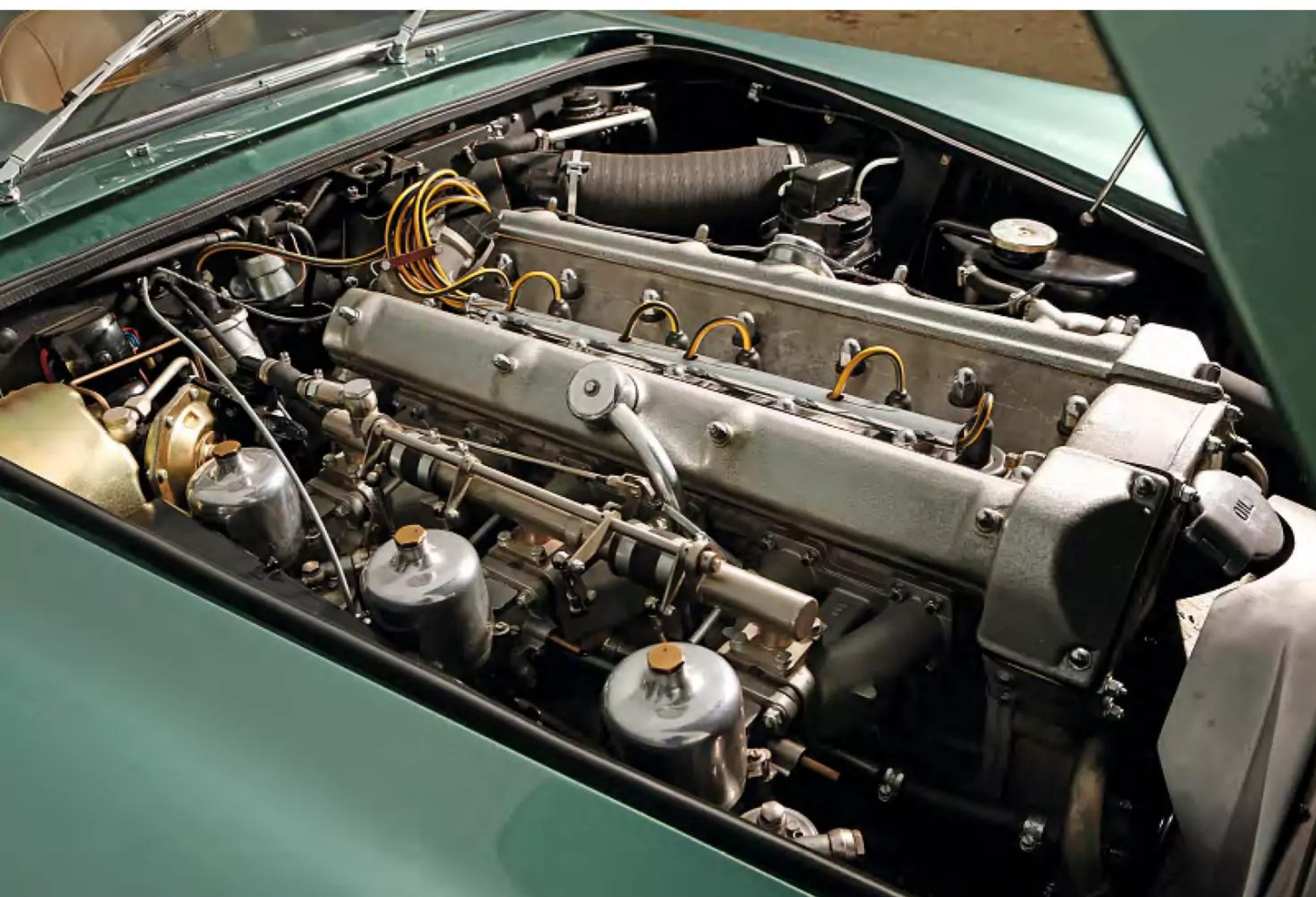
In fact, I would venture that no Aston Martin before or since has had the initial impact of the DB4. In 1958, this was the fastest four-seater (if you accepted that the rear seats were usable) that *The Autocar* had ever tested, famously being capable of 0-100mph and back again inside 30 seconds.

Aston Martin and Maserati came to remarkably similar conclusions in their search for the ideal specification for a mid-'50s GT. When you consider that the DB4 and 3500 were both developed by companies competing at the highest levels of sports-car and Grand Prix competition, the broad technical parallels are perhaps not so surprising. Both had all-aluminium, wet-liner straight-sixes of less than 4 litres giving well in excess of 200bhp, tuned for reliable flexibility at one end and anything up to 140mph at the other.

These were engines that could trace their lineage directly to racing machinery of very recent memory. Aston Martin made no secret of the fact that the DB4's seven-bearing, 3.7-litre



From top: DB4's cabin is more sober than that of its Italian rival; Superleggera body was built under licence in Feltham and Newport Pagnell; this Aston's twin-cam 'six' has been enlarged to 4.7 litres, meaning significant extra grunt; narrow rear seat; wires with trademark three-eared spinners



TOURING OF MILAN

Founded in 1926, the Milanese *carrozzeria* patented its famous Superleggera method of construction in the late '30s. Its origins trace back to when the firm produced air frames and Weymann fabric bodies. By cladding a skeleton of narrow-gauge steel tubes in unstressed aluminium panels, the designers could retain the lightness of the Weymann body but with greatly increased strength. The technique also meant the skin could be formed in voluptuous, streamlined shapes, most memorably on the Alfa 8C's chassis.

Touring's association with Aston Martin began with a DB2/4-based roadster that was shown at Turin in 1956, and which had been commissioned as a competition prize by the *Daily Express*. Aston's John Wyer favoured Superleggera construction, and it seemed natural for the firm to go for Italian styling for its next generation of cars – particularly since in-house designer Frank Feeley was unwilling to move from Feltham to Newport Pagnell.

Aston's chief engineer, Harold Beach – who thought Touring was "a fantastic crowd" – designed a platform chassis to which the Italians could weld their tubular frame; the first DB4 prototype, styled by Federico Formenti, was running by March 1957.

That same month, Maserati showed the Touring-styled 3500GT at Geneva, its



DB2/4 roadster was the first Touring-bodied Aston

handsome lines having beaten rival Zagato and Allemano designs. As well as being the Trident's first production car, the 3500GT opened a whole new chapter for Touring, which by then was building series models for Alfa and was about to start making Lancia Flaminia GTs. Production would increase from fewer than 300 bodies a year to a peak of nearly 3000 in 1960. The company would become truly industrialised: instead of hand-beaten panels, bodies would be built from large sections pressed by outside suppliers and assembled at a facility in Nova Milanese.

The delays caused by the ambitious move to this new factory, compounded by strikes and difficulties with newly hired workers, eventually caught up with the firm. It was undercapitalised, too; the directors had financed the plant with their own funds, leaving nothing to fall back on when the country's economy faltered. The cancellation of a contract with Rootes to build the Alpine and the Super Minx probably sealed Touring's fate. It fell into receivership in 1963, although production continued until 1965.

Among the last one-offs it produced was the Aston DBS prototype, shown at Earls Court in 1966. Other than the Shah of Iran's 5000GT, however, and several unsuccessful attempts to update the 3500GT, Touring would never body another Maserati.

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‘six’, designed by Tadek Merek, had been developed in the DBR sports cars. Similarly, Giulio Alfieri’s 3485cc unit, with its 12-plug head and shim-adjusted bucket tappets, was a product of both the 350S and 250F racers.

Weighing in at around 3000lb apiece, both cars featured high-fashion styling by Touring of Milan, beautifully rendered in aluminium. The Maserati’s coachwork was produced in Touring’s own factory (alongside various models from Alfa Romeo and Lancia), whereas Aston Martin took a licence on the famous Superleggera method of construction and built its shells in-house, first at Feltham and later (from 1963) at Newport Pagnell.

Under the skin, both cars had ruggedly conventional but well-groomed chassis. Here were prime examples of what could be done with a well-located live axle and careful weight distribution by engineers who were still mistrustful of fully independent rear ends on fast cars. Aston’s Harold Beach would have preferred a de Dion set-up for his DB4, but, for want of a sufficiently quiet differential, he made do with a Watt linkage and trailing links for the axle. He coil-sprung the Aston, whereas Alfieri thought that semi-elliptics would be adequate for the new Maserati GT; the Ghibli and Indy used the same basic set-up into the 1970s, so maybe he was right.

Maserati was a true master in the art of aluminium casting, and it engineered the 3500 around an international mixture of bought-in components – Salisbury rear axle and ZF gearbox, plus Alford and Adler wishbone front suspension to name just a few. Aston took a more bespoke approach, with its own top and



ASTON MARTIN DB4

Sold/number built 1958-’63/1185

Construction steel chassis, aluminium Superleggera body

Engine all-alloy, dohc 3670cc straight-six, twin or triple SU carburettors

Max power 240bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 240lb ft @ 4250rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, trailing links, Watt linkage, lever-arm dampers; coil springs f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 14ft 9in (4496mm)

Width 5ft 6in (1676mm)

Height 4ft 4½in (1334mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2in (2489mm)

Weight 3080lb (1400kg)

0-60mph 9.3 secs

Top speed 140mph **Mpg** 16

Price new £3505



MASERATI 3500GT

Sold/number built 1957-’64/1981

Construction steel chassis, aluminium Superleggera body

Engine all-alloy, dohc 3485cc straight-six, twin spark plugs per cylinder, triple Weber carburettors or Lucas fuel injection

Max power 235bhp @ 5800rpm

Max torque 232lb ft @ 4800rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes discs

Length 15ft 8¼in (4780mm)

Width 5ft 9¼in (1760mm)

Height 4ft 3½in (1310mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 6½in (2600mm)

Weight 3175lb (1440kg)

0-60mph 7.5 secs

Top speed 129mph **Mpg** 16

Price new £5852



From top: floor-hinged pedals in the English car; trident logo on elegant gearlever; whether you prefer the notchback styling of the Maserati or the fastback Aston, each is the very definition of a sophisticated grand tourer

bottom ball-jointed front end, again developed on the Le Mans cars, along with rack-and-pinion steering and a four-speed 'box supplied, of course, by patron David Brown.

'Our' Maserati is a late example with Lucas fuel injection, four-wheel Dunlop disc brakes and a five-speed ZF gearbox. In fact, 33 DYM is an ex-Earls Court Motor Show and press car that was tested by Gregor Grant in *Autosport*. It is therefore one of the last of nearly 2000 to feature this body style, which was first seen in 1957 and remained current right through to 1965. At a shade over £3500, a Series 2 Aston Martin DB4 such as this one, with its improved brakes and bigger capacity, 17-gallon fuel tank, was more than £2000 cheaper than the import-duty-loaded Italian.

Out on the road, these are cars that make you feel special. They are imbued with a power and poise that lift you above humdrum concerns, although their heavy controls and lusty feel won't be to all tastes. Both require the sort of physical effort to drive that places their origins firmly back in the 1950s.

Once seated inside, each provides a noble view down a long and shapely bonnet, but, of the two, the Aston Martin has the better-planned, better-ventilated interior. It has slim roof pillars and a good driving position, one where your hand falls naturally from the large, 16in steering wheel to the gearlever, and your feet work easily on the nicely spaced, floor-hinged pedals. The delicate rear-view mirror makes following vehicles look lower and meaner than they really are, and everything about the cabin is neatly trimmed for an aura of workmanlike luxury.

The Maserati's interior is smaller but less sober and well ordered. It's flashier, perhaps, with its electric windows and fat, cream leather seats that are needlessly large and not very

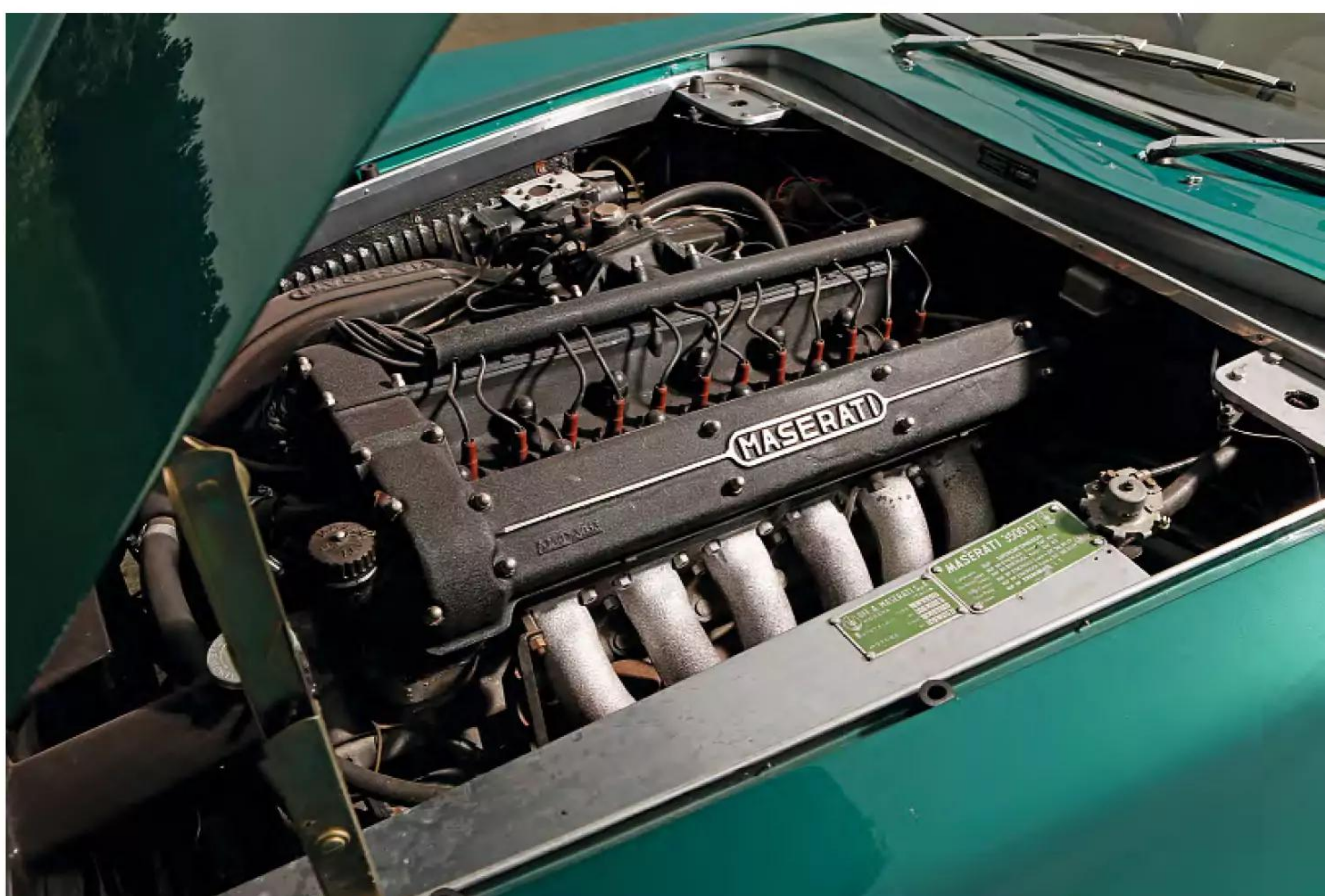
'Both sound similarly expensive, with a fussy sophistication and throaty exhaust sound'

embracing – although potentially nervous passengers get an almost comically massive, padded grabhandle as compensation. You sit commandingly in the 3500, with your arms stretched out on the big, black plastic-rimmed wheel. Your knees do feel somewhat high, but your right foot moves effortlessly from brake to accelerator, so heel and toeing is very natural.

Even today, either car will shoot you up to 100mph before you have grabbed fourth gear. It is not quite a fair fight, though, because 'our' pampered DB4 – restored in 2012 by Thornley Kelham – has a variety of RS Williams improvements. Chief among the tweaks is a 4.7-litre engine conversion that gives it the best part of an extra 100bhp, plus goodness knows how much additional torque. The rev-counter needle certainly leaps crisply round the dial at the merest caress of the throttle pedal, and the only thing missing from a perfect set of gear ratios is a nice high overdrive that would cut down the noise. This car feels as if it will sit on



From top: vast, thin-rimmed wheel and grabhandle dominate the fascia; Italian script, but the Lucas injection system is British; Maserati 3500GT's 'six' features a twin-plug head design; pressed-steel wheels and hubcaps may sound prosaic but look great; beautifully trimmed rear seats





From top: profile would influence that of the Lancia Flaminia GT, the work of the same Milanese *carrozzeria*; Maserati corners in a flat, composed manner but still rides with aplomb

an unrestricted highway at 130mph (with lots more to come, if you feel the need), getting there in a potent yet beautifully modulated flow of power that is raw and brawny, but never brutal or vicious.

With the revs rising, the Aston and Maserati sound similarly expensive: their fussy, well-bred sophistication combined with throatily booming exhaust notes. Should you not wish to draw attention, however, either car will pull away with the decorum of a mayoral limousine at low speeds, with clutches that just about match each other for substantial heft combined with easy-to-use, snatch-free smoothness.

In the DB4, most open-road overtaking manoeuvres can be dispatched without changing out of top – just as well, because the gearbox has a gritty, macho feel about it that matches the car's personality. In the Maserati, you need to access the mid-range revs or just accept that you can't whip past traffic with the same aggression. The 3500's five-speed ZF gearbox is naturally more versatile and lighter to handle, but with a rather narrow gate, and it's easy to slot it into fifth when you're looking for third. There's also quite a lot of gear whine once the oil has warmed.

Like the Aston Martin, the Maserati has a magnificently flexible motor, pulling in one long, even lunge from the steady 500rpm tickover to a throaty 5500rpm, where it makes the most of its 235 horses. You could order any of seven different final-drive ratios for your 3500GT, tailoring it for maximum acceleration, optimum top speed or a good compromise between the two. I'm not sure which back end this example is running, but it feels strong and healthy, illustrating how well these Lucas injection engines can pull when they are



properly set up. Anybody would be content with it, and – allowing for the British car's sneaky extra litre – it's easy to see how the two would have been closely matched in straight-line urge. According to period road tests, the Aston probably enjoyed a slight edge.

Both cars have a flat and firm but comfortable ride, reassuringly potent, servo-assisted disc brakes and thoroughly vice-free handling. Again, there's the caveat that, with its upgraded dampers and revised geometry, the Aston is probably sharper than it would have been in 1961. It just feels sorted in a way that leaves the Maserati seeming ever so slightly ponderous – mainly because the Italian car's steering is lower-geared and, being a box rather than a rack, inherently less direct. Nonetheless, it corners flat and true, and holds no surprises for either novice or hooligan. Somehow, though, it feels more of a period piece. It is as if its designers realised that the typical playboy/industrialist owner would be more focused on smoking a cigarette while enjoying the attention, so why make things more difficult?

That's not to say that this DB4 is so far from

standard: I've driven enough of them to know that. Shod, as it is, with period-correct 'full profile' tyres, the essential characteristics can't be too far removed from the original designer's intent. Its direct, slop-free steering loads up for safety on tight bends taken quickly, the idea being that you unload it by booting the tail round with the throttle. It is hard to resist the urge to adopt tearaway tactics on roundabouts, where you can control a slide with surprising delicacy. Thank goodness the lady in the burger van didn't see me contemplating that...

Of course, if you and I were standing in a lay-by one sunny afternoon we might relish the idea of watching an Aston DB4 and a Maserati 3500GT being gunned up a country road, and some people would even pay for the privilege – but wouldn't it be a boring world if we all liked the same things?

As to which one you take home, I suspect that the decision – both then and now – would come down to the two basic things that make the world go round: looks and money. If you feel jaded by the continual hype that surrounds the Aston Martin marque – and the '60s models in particular – you will feel naturally disposed to finding the Maserati prettier, or a least less familiar. Today, thanks to the mystical 'Aston tax' (and the exploits of a certain fictional secret agent), this DB4 could command well over double the fee that it would take to part the fully restored Maserati from its current owner. Such a price differential is obviously nonsense, but it must make the 3500GT some sort of bargain. 

Thanks to Hal Walter; Thornley Kelham (thornleykelham.com); Cotswold Classic Car Restorations (cotswoldclassicarrestorations.co.uk)

Glamour... *without the glitz*

With thoroughbred pedigree and looks to tempt West Coast millionaires, is the 3500GT Spyder the Maserati that has it all? What better way to find out than a drive on its home turf

WORDS **JAMES ELLIOTT** PHOTOGRAPHY **MASERATI SPA/JAMES ELLIOTT**



Right: Automotoclub Storico Italiano plaque spoils the stylish dash. Below: the 3500GT is a relaxing tourer, at home on the smooth and sinuous roads of its Modena birthplace



It must have been difficult for motor manufacturers to keep up with the demands of the rapidly expanding economies of the developed world in the 1950s. As the USA thrived and the majority of Europe slowly emerged from crippling post-war austerity, the booming wealth – and the voracious appetite for the high-priced trinkets that came with it – turned car-makers' initial post-war business models on their heads.

As a result, spurred on by renewed economic optimism, most of the prestige sporting marques followed a set path through the latter part of the decade and into the early 1960s. Step one was to drop a peppy, race-bred powerplant into an opulent (and luxuriously priced) *gran turismo* coupé. Step two was to bow to public pressure, particularly from North America, and churn out a glamorous open-topped variant within a couple of years.

They were all at it, the leaders in the field being Ferrari with its various 250 derivatives, plus Aston Martin with the DB4. Today, these top-spec high-performance machines are highly prized and valued accordingly. Not exactly forgotten, but always (and inexplicably) lagging behind – certainly when it comes to price-tags, despite the fact that when new it was monumentally expensive – was the inevitable rival offering from Modena.

The Maserati 3500GT Vignale Spyder, as the name suggests, was spawned by the 3500GT, the sexy 3½-litre hardtop launched to general acclaim in 1957 and packing a derivation of the 350S sports-racer's straight-six motor. Despite the vast majority of the 2000 coupés being built by Touring, Maserati surprisingly spurned the *carrozzeria's* own drop-top proposal when it appeared at Geneva, instead turning to Vignale to create the convertible 2+2 version.

Generally accepted to have been penned by the prolific Giovanni Michelotti, the Spyder was a svelte and understated open-top beauty, the latter quality – along with the more hardened-enthusiast nature of its badge –

perhaps explaining why it has become the most overlooked member of the trio.

That and the fact that, at least by Maserati standards, it was considered a bit of a mongrel, even if that did mean only that the driveline was largely bought-in. There was the staple ZF gearbox – at first with four speeds, later five – double wishbones for the front from the Jaguar Mk2, Girling brakes and a Salisbury differential in a range of ratios, plus a limited-slip option. Even the Maserati bigwigs donned sackcloth and ashes to explain away the Vignale as a British car with an Italian body.

The styling is all-Italian, though, and it is truly sensational. It's far from petite, even on a wheelbase shortened some 4in from that of the coupé, but there is a delicacy that mimics the Ferrari 250 and offers the same sensuous curves, melding the necessary baubles efficiently into the metalwork.

Inside, it is equally welcoming. Sure, the occasional rear seats of the longer coupé have been reduced to little more than a pair of seat bases wedged on either side of the transmission tunnel behind the sumptuous, well-padded front chairs, but there is space aplenty for the two passengers ahead of them. The hood folds neatly and unobtrusively, and the rear might just be usable with it down, but the mere thought of being in the back with the roof raised is pretty unpleasant. That's not where you'd want to be, anyway. The wide and comfortable driver's seat is where it's all at.

With electric windows and all manner of then-decadent trappings, the cabin is a glorious place to be. Peering through the large Nardi three-spoke steering wheel, you spy a cluster of large Jaeger dials nestled in a clear, Aston Martin-esque binnacle directly ahead of the driver. The speedometer hints at an optimistic 250kph (155mph), while the rev counter circles to 8000rpm, the entire last 3000 of it in the red. There are the usual minor gauges, plus – as is the wont on most upmarket Italian fare – oil temperature and pressure readings. The rest of the dashboard is a picture of restrained

simplicity, a brushed panel interspersed with a few switches, and below them a simple heater with two sliding controls.

The driver's footwell narrows but is spacious enough, which it needs to be to house the three big pedals straight in front (at least that's where they are in a left-hooker; in the handful of right-hand-drive cars they are quite offset).

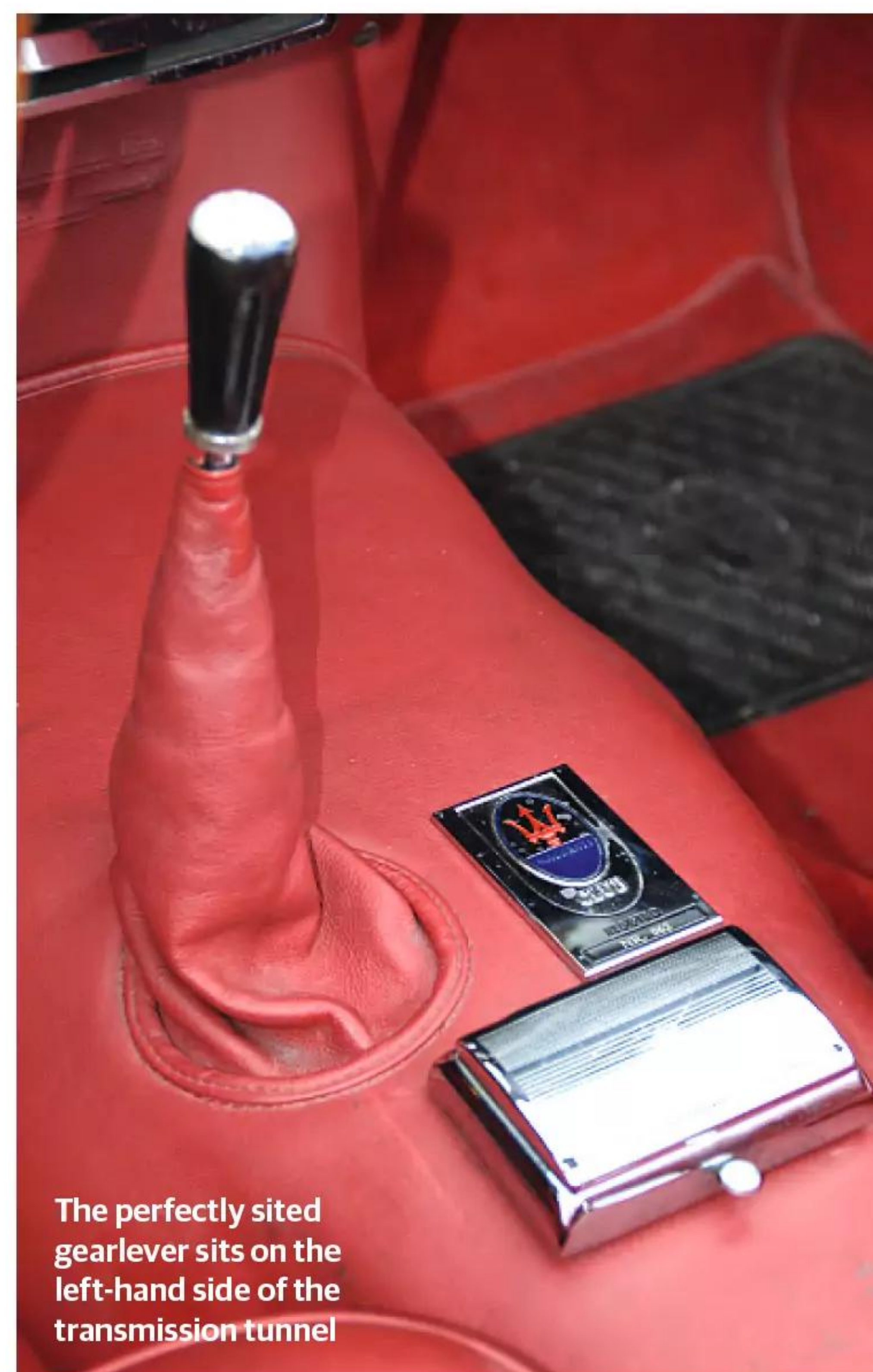
Fire up and the gruff pitter-patter of that thoroughbred, undersquare straight-six is intoxicating. Unlike the all-injected Mistral, you could have your Vignale – as here – with a trio of Webers, which not only adds to the fuel efficiency but also, according to owners, greatly reduces maintenance costs. As you pull away, you get your first sense of one of the car's highlights: its barrowful of low-down torque

and superb tractability. Soon you are up to speed, snicking the slender wand lever as it works beautifully through that slick German gearbox, accompanied by successive bursts of energy through the twin exhaust pipes.

Push the Maserati harder and you start to appreciate all of those hefty British- and German-sourced underpinnings. Giulio Alfieri, the mastermind behind this model and its siblings, wanted the marque's luxury cars to be reliable as well as beautiful, to banish perceptions that fragility was the price you paid for performance. You certainly feel the benefit of that philosophy on the road. Maserati actually made the brake discs, but there is no mistaking the Girling system in operation: the retardation is sharp and responsive.



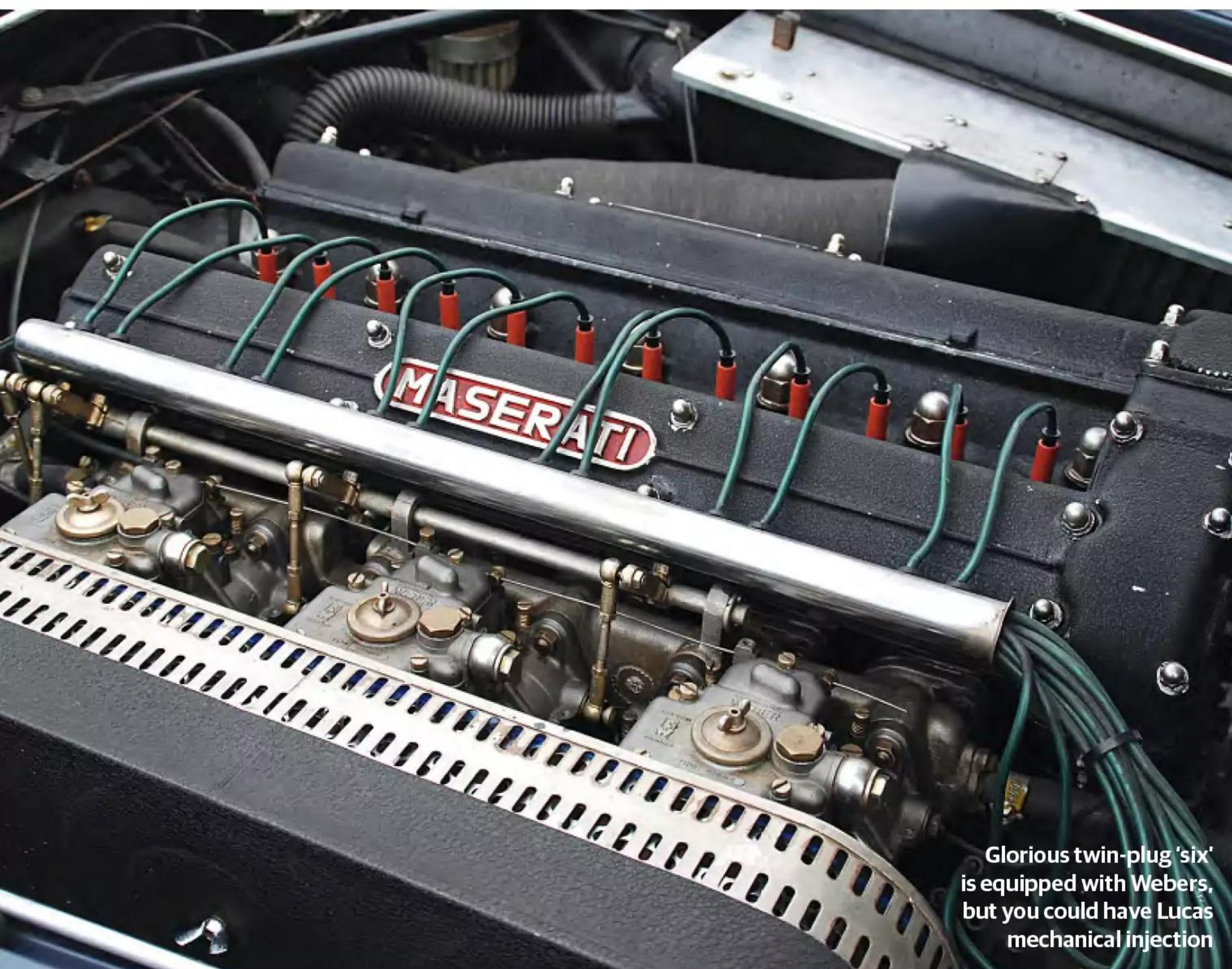
'Pull away and you immediately sense a barrowful of low-down torque and superb tractability'



The perfectly sited gearlever sits on the left-hand side of the transmission tunnel



Sweet-riding 3500 corners with aplomb, but is no sports car



Glorious twin-plug 'six' is equipped with Webers, but you could have Lucas mechanical injection



From left: chromed details add class without being showy; Jaeger and Lucas dials nestle behind three-spoke Nardi wheel, sited perfectly within driver's line of sight

The ride is cossetting, but it firms up the harder you drive the car, while the steering is light – perfect for enthusiastic driving, but perhaps a fraction too light for pushing the Vignale beyond that level of commitment.

Riding on 185 R16 radial-shod Borrani wires, this particular 3500GT corners more adroitly than I remember from previous drives, but you still wouldn't want to be feathering it on the limit as you would an Aston, just as the Vignale's scuttle shake tempers the most gung-ho driver. There is no question the Spyder is a wonderful tourer, however, with a highly impressive lick of speed (for its era) when you wind it up, rather than a pure driving machine.

But does it matter that the Vignale doesn't perform or handle like a racing car? I think not, because that's not what it was built for. It was created to satisfy a burgeoning elite who equated performance simply with speed: they wanted to cross continents rapidly in comfort, and they wanted to look damned cool while doing it. For Italians, the glamour of *La Dolce Vita* was becoming a reality, not just an

aspiration, and few cars better embodied this sentiment than the 3500 Vignale Spyder. In all of those respects, Maserati scored a bullseye. The fact that anyone with a passion for motoring got all of that, plus a pretty fine-handling car with a sublime soundtrack from one of the loveliest and smoothest straight-six engines imaginable, was merely a bonus.

So what of prices? When it was new, this car would have set you back close to £6500, which was a terrifying amount of cash in the late '50s, on a par with its rival from Ferrari and close to twice the price of a DB4 Convertible. Today, though, either a contemporary Ferrari 250GT Pinin Farina Cabriolet Series II – by far the cheapest of the open-top 250s, you don't even want to think about Californias – or the DB4 will set you back twice the cost of the Maserati.

Are they worth the difference? Maybe, if what you want above all is a Ferrari or Aston badge, but otherwise probably not. You could argue with some conviction that the Maserati should be the one that is twice the price. So buy now, it's an investment. In joy.



KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

Claudio Ivaldi doesn't show any guilt that he "inherited" this car because, in doing so, he sort of saved it. His father, a well-known collector with all manner of Italian exotics to his name, was about to offload the less rare and less expensive Vignale because he was finding it increasingly difficult to drive. That's when his son, vice president of the Maserati Club in Italy, stepped in and begged him not to.

Father and son struck a deal whereby Claudio would take on the car, but also all the running costs and maintenance. He hasn't regretted it for a moment and would never part with the Spyder. It is looked after for him by local guru Gandini, whose boss worked on the Maserati production line in the '60s, and it has so far been relatively affordable to maintain and enjoy.

MASERATI 3500GT SPYDER

Sold/number built 1959-'64/242

Construction steel chassis, steel body

Engine all-alloy, dohc 3485cc straight-six, with twin spark plugs and three Weber 42DCOE carburettors

Max power 220bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 253lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission ZF five-speed manual, RWD via Salisbury differential

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes Girling discs, with servo

Length 14ft 7¼in (4450mm)

Width 5ft 4½in (1635mm)

Height 4ft 3½in (1310mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2½in (2500mm)

Weight 3042lb (1380kg)

0-60mph 8.4 secs

Top speed 137mph **Mpg** 19

Price new £6346 (1962)

COMMAND PERFORMANCE

A royal order for a coupé with a racing V8 sired the Maserati
5000GT – and the ultimate *gran turismo* was born

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICK WALSH





A premier exotic has to fulfil certain criteria. Obviously it must be super-rare – to the degree that few people have seen one on the road – an outrageous price tag denotes very limited production and, of course, it should be bespoke and handmade. Performance, at least on paper, should be spectacular, developing an almost mythical reputation for the car. Candidates for this group might include the Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale and Delahaye 165 V12.

In such company, today's Bugatti Chiron is already too common, but one guaranteed member of the exclusive club is the Maserati 5000GT. This late-'50s supercoupé ticks every box for eligibility. Its fantastic, if ultimately unproven, performance was the result of its all-alloy, quad-cam 5-litre V8 engine, developed from a spectacular sports-racing car, the Maserati 450S. Matched to highly individual coachwork by Italy's finest stylists, the 5000GT's ultra-rich clientele ranged from millionaire sportspeople to a Mexican president.

Like many of the greatest cars, each of the 34 5000GTs are often referred to by their first owners rather than chassis numbers. Each car lost Maserati money and few clocked up any distance, not only because wealthy buyers didn't have time but also, confidentially, because the 5000GT's mighty spec made them ultimately unusable. It was one thing for factory test driver Guerino Bertocchi to impress passengers by blasting down the Autostrada del Sole to prove the Maserati's awesome performance, but it's quite another to motor any distance. Like race team owners Briggs Cunningham and John Simone, you really needed a team of mechanics to tune the beast.

In 1959, the 5000GT was the Alfa 8C-2900 *berlinetta* of its era, the most elitist thing on wheels. Some displayed bizarre styling focused around a signature motif and one even inspired a legendary rock lyric: 'My Maserati does one-eighty-five. I lost my licence, now I don't drive.' It didn't matter that former Eagles star Joe Walsh was optimistic about his Allemano-bodied GT's top speed in *Life's Been Good* – it sounded great and added to the mythology of the monarch from Modena.

Frustratingly, most survivors eventually sat silent under covers in dark corners of secret underground garages. Such was the 5000GT's reputation for big bills that few owners were prepared to invest in reviving these fantastic machines. But as the values of more established Ferraris and Maseratis spiralled, so collectors started looking for alternatives – and slowly the 5000GTs were rediscovered.

In keeping with its special appeal, the car inspired some obsessive collecting patterns. A chance encounter with a 5000GT in Mexico City in 1968 was never forgotten by Alfredo Brener, then aged 16. When he had amassed his fortune, he tracked down five different cars, spent huge sums restoring them, exhibited them at Pebble Beach and then sold them all.

Such an extreme only fuels the legend, but it pales in comparison with the story of chassis 066. An Allemano-bodied 5000GT, it was

specially delivered by Bertocchi from the factory to Munich for its sheikh owner, who wasn't present when the car arrived. As a result it remained parked outside for years and was nearly crushed when local authorities tired of the abandoned exotic. It was saved from the scrapper's truck for just DM50, but it remains in a sad state awaiting restoration.

The origins of the other 5000GTs are similarly intriguing. Story has it that Omer Orsi, son of Maserati's owner, Adolfo, tried to help revive sales by sending brochures to the prominent and the wealthy. Soon after the sales literature for a 3500GT and 450S racer had been mailed to the Shah of Persia, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Iranian Embassy in Rome was instructed to set up a meeting with Maserati. One November Sunday in 1958, the Shah stunned engineer Giulio Alfieri and Orsi with a request for a roadgoing Maserati based on the 450S.

Swamped by unpaid debts, Maserati had already withdrawn from motorsport to focus on road-car production, and out of the blue a benefactor was agreeing to pay for the development and build of a special Maserati GT car. The Shah's brief specified ultimate performance (Alfieri reputedly guaranteed 280kph, or 178mph) and a two-seater coupé style with a usable boot.

Back at the factory, Alfieri immediately started work on the first 5000GT Tipo 103, chassis 002, mating a much-strengthened 3500 frame with the racing V8 motor. Modifications for road use included upping the capacity to 4937cc and reducing compression to 8.5:1, but the helical-gear camshaft drive remained, as did twin Marelli distributors, 16 spark plugs



Nardi tops off stylish cockpit's quality leather and Jaeger dials

and four twin-choke Weber 45s. Underpinnings followed the 3500: independent front and live-axle rear, with power-assisted Girling discs at the front and large drums at the back.

Bertone was the first choice as body-builder, but Orsi eventually gave the contract to Touring with the proviso that it must look very different from the production 3500GT. Styling chief Carlo Anderloni later said Persian baroque architecture influenced the body's bizarre grille with its pronounced Maserati trident. Such gaudy details continued on the inside, with gold-plated dials and switches. Few saw the prototype 5000GT outside the factory, because the finished car was immediately shipped to the Shah in Iran. Later, when the Shah was deposed, the Maserati was moved to his chalet in Gstaad. By 2005 it had only covered 3750 miles. A second Touring coupé was built and, after presentation at the '59 Turin Salon, was bought by South African millionaire and Kyalami track owner Basil Read.

Orders from the world's wealthiest followed, but no sale was confirmed for build unless customers paid a sizeable chunk of the £5364 total price as a deposit. Interest was boosted

when US journalist Hans Tanner secured scoop driving impressions of the second 5000GT. With Bertocchi at the wheel, Tanner reported clocking a staggering 172mph on the *autostrada* from Modena to Bologna. Even more impressive was 158mph through 'a long sweeping curve on the return road'. He added: 'If anything can be said against this fabulous car, it is only that these speeds are too easy. Everything is smooth and quiet.'

After the first two Series 1 cars, the 5000GT was further developed for extra refinement. The bore and stroke were then less oversquare, which flattened the torque curve, and the intrusive racing gear-cam drive was modified to a quieter triple-strand chain. Horsepower dropped by 15bhp to 325bhp, mostly due to the new Lucas fuel injection taking the place of the competition Webers. The Series 2 engines were given signature green paint for heads and cam covers, while other improvements included new ratios for the ZF four-speed 'box, followed by a five-speed. Discs were fitted all round.

Maserati's order book was looking mighty impressive, with many of Italy's foremost industrial magnates – including Giovanni

Agnelli and Ferdinando Innocenti – ordering bespoke cars, as well as Hollywood star Stewart Granger, millionaire sportsman Briggs Cunningham and various princes. Where Bugatti had failed to sell the Royale to kings, the Orsi family could count several – even be they deposed – as customers. When the rebellious King Saud was asked to leave Cairo, his Frua-bodied 5000GT, 048, was impounded for non-payment of taxes. After the sad-looking 12,700km 'barn-find' was auctioned by Bonhams at Monaco in 2000, it made a new benchmark price of £222,042. Behind the scenes not all were happy, however. German businessman Rolf Helm insisted Maserati overhaul the engine of 006 in the presence of his mechanic Peter Reuffel. Others reported rough engines and lacklustre performance.

Now values of these fabled cars are steadily increasing, so several enthusiasts have commissioned extensive engine rebuilds to release the potential power. Foremost in this development is German specialist Robertino Wild, who, after historic-racing success with two 450S monsters, seemed the natural choice to sort a 5000GT. Amazingly, Robertino had no

Clockwise: bold trident; packed engine bay; tail-light cluster; the Capricorn team with 250F 2529; cooling vent



Giovanni Michelotti styled the Allemano bodywork

ambitions to become a historic-car specialist. While studying as a medical student, he rebuilt the engine of his Ducati motorcycle, and a friend, impressed by his competence, asked if he'd look at a Porsche four-cam motor. "With all those bevel gears, it looked similar to my Ducati, so I didn't feel intimidated," says Robertino. "I was only 20 and gave up medicine to become an old-car doctor."

"Maseratis are special and for me they don't compare with Ferraris. The engineers were really dedicated to the cars, and the machining is a fine art. When you look at the polished components, such as the 250F's suspension, you can see the hundreds of hours of work. Despite the company's financial problems, it's clear that the team really loved the cars."

Robertino rapidly built up a reputation for historic Maserati racers as A6GCS, 'Birdcage' and 250F passed through his meticulous workshop. One of his most challenging projects was to sort the magnificent 450S of Hartmut Ibing. "Maserati had done great things with the straight-six, but the V8 was a steep learning curve," Robertino recalls. "Power was not a problem, but the engine needed to be more

responsive. They didn't have the facilities we have today, and getting the crank balanced was an issue. We discovered that the weight was in all the wrong places and the only solution was to redesign the crank from scratch. With lighter conrods and improved weight distribution, the 450S delivered more than 400bhp, but with more responsive revs and torque."

Once it was sorted, the dark-blue 450S was a revelation, and its winning ways attracted the attention of the owner of 5000GT 042, who wanted performance and drivability to match a fastidious cosmetic restoration by Bacchelli in Modena. When the mint Allemano-bodied coupé arrived at Robertino's impressive Mönchengladbach facility, the challenge was to finally make the 5000GT deliver on its dramatic promise. He says: "After the 450S, the project looked easier to do in theory, but in the end it presented its own problems. At first the engine felt rough. It had a great sound but was unwilling to rev, and the torque was lifeless."

With the crank removed, it was clear Alfieri and the Maserati engineers struggled with the V8's bottom end. Extra metal had been crudely welded to the counterweights to get it to rev

MASERATI 5000GT

Sold/number built 1959-'64/34 (S1: 2, S2: 32)

Construction steel ladder-frame chassis, steel or aluminium body by various coachbuilders

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4935/4941cc 90° V8, with two valves per cylinder and four Weber ID16 carburettors (S1) or Lucas injection (S2)

Max power 325bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 326lb ft @ 3600rpm

Transmission four/five-speed ZF manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, leaf springs; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes Girling discs/drums (S1) or all discs (S2)

Length 15ft 7in (4760mm)

Width 5ft 7in (1700mm)

Height 4ft 4in (1320mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 6in (2600mm)

Weight 3642lb (1652kg)

0-60mph 6.5 secs

Top speed 172mph **Mpg** 15

Price new \$12,900 (1959)



The second 5000GT was Touring-bodied (4) and shown at Turin in 1959



THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING 5000GTs

1 Least successful coachwork fitted to a 5000GT was Michelotti's design for American millionaire Briggs Cunningham, who was also a US Maserati importer. Cunningham's brief was for a closed version of the 450S racer, but the result – with low, covered headlights – looks unbalanced and slab-sided. Once Michelotti's new facility had finished the silver coupé, Cunningham drove it regularly to attend race meetings, including Le Mans, where his Tipo 151 team cars were competing. Chassis 016 was later shipped to the USA, but it was discovered in Poland in the 1990s by Mexican collector Alfredo Brenner. This was the only 5000GT with a speedometer in miles per hour.

2 Two unique Maseratis have not been seen since the 1960s. Lambretta scooter manufacturer Ferdinando Innocenti ordered chassis 018 with a Ghia body designed by Sergio Sartorelli, who later became head of Fiat design. Special features included a short final drive that limited top speed to 152mph. It was road-tested by Bernard Cahier, but, after display at Turin in '62, the coupé vanished. It could still be with the Innocenti family.



Cunningham's Michelotti-built 016 (1) at Monza

3 Another missing car is a Bertone-bodied one-off by a young Giorgetto Giugiaro. With lines similar to the Aston Martin Jet 1, it's the most conventional-looking of the elite group. The design was turned down by the Shah of Persia in favour of Touring, but Bertone completed it for display at Turin in '61, where it was received rapturously. Maserati later gave it a Tipo 104 chassis number, and some believe it was a Mexico prototype. Eventually the Bertone coupé was sold to Spain, after various cosmetic changes including Borrani wheels, quad headlights and a silver repaint.

4 Visitors to the '59 Turin show thought they were seeing double when near-identical silver Pininfarina coupés appeared on the stands of both Maserati and the Turin coachbuilder. Neither the Ferrari 400 Superfast nor 5000GT chassis 008 had badges, having been ordered by industrialist Giovanni Agnelli. Modifications to the 5000GT included a hand-operated clutch: Agnelli had lost his foot in a road crash in 1952. In 1965, 008 returned to Maserati to be converted back, and for years was UK-owned with a right-hand-drive conversion.



Missing chassis 018 (2) was ordered by Innocenti



Fine Bertone-bodied Tipo 104 (3) is also missing



more smoothly. "This wasn't a repair, but how the engine left the factory," explains Robertino. "Maserati had only used static balancing and the orientation was wrong. One pair of counterweights was completely missing. It would have made sense to follow American V8 theory, but, typically Italian, they were too proud and thought they knew better. Much of the engineering was about guessing and feeling, so what they achieved was amazing; our approach was more calculated."

Combined with the newly machined crank, lighter rods and pistons were also developed. Once they were assembled, Robertino turned to the injection: "The Lucas system is effective, but the Italians didn't really understand it and used a mixture adjustment linked to oil pressure and air density – a real headache. We simplified it." Key to this refinement was Lee Muir, an ex-McLaren Can-Am engineer with vast experience of the Lucas system. Once the indirect injection was refined, the V8's character was transformed with smooth power and gutsy low-down torque.

With the 5000GT's potential unleashed, Robertino's team set about making the car safe



Rare sight of a 5000GT on the open road. The engine note is simply magnificent

enough for such performance to be used. “We stiffened up the front end with recalibrated dampers, but we’re still not happy with the steering,” he says. “The chassis is essentially the same as the 3500GT’s, but with extra reinforcement. Maserati was concerned about the extra weight of the V8, so adjusted the steering box ratios to lighten the load. As a result it’s not direct enough for the performance.” Ever the perfectionist, Robertino is keen not to change the character of the car.

Time to try the sorted 5000GT. Of all the bodies, Allemano’s is most common, with 22 built, but it is also the most alluring. Its long, sleek flanks and wraparound glass top with slim pillars accentuate the bonnet length. The Studebaker-style panoramic rear window is steeply raked, and only the rectangular headlights spoil its handsome lines. Riding on expensive Borrani wire wheels, it looks unmistakably Maserati. Inside the bright, glassy cockpit there’s nothing flash about the fittings: quality leather and brushed stainless trim, bold Jaeger dials and a broad Nardi wheel with angled spokes so the pilot can clearly see the speedometer and rev counter.

When I take over the wheel, the muscular 5-litre is already warm, so Robertino insists I use all the revs up to 6000rpm. Frustratingly, we’re not heading for the *autobahn* but some clear country roads, yet through the town the 5000GT is easy to drive with its silky, low-geared steering. Rush the ZF gearchange and it will grate, but once you are in tune with its timing, the action is precise. The clutch is heavy and requires a hefty push, but, with so much torque in reserve, the car will cruise easily even if you wrong-slot it. The brakes lack feel, but I’m assured that when you really push they transform and bite hard. First impressions are of a superb ride (even over *pavé*), a taut chassis and minimal steering kickback.

Once out on the open road, I finally get the chance to unleash the engine’s glorious power. From an edgy rumble as we slow for a clear stretch, I bury the throttle and the car lets rip a Wagneresque exhaust crescendo. The 5000GT lunges forward with a glorious yowl exclusive to exotic V8s. The engine seems to have a triple range when gunned hard: deep burble builds to vibrant growl before a resounding roar as the power peaks. The sensational acceleration

rapidly reels in the next junction just as I change into third at 100mph. Even so, it feels as if there’s much more in reserve, and it’s easy to believe that 170mph is within the 5000GT’s grasp. Irritating as the myriad junctions are, you do get to play Behra in a 450S at every stop, thanks to that ferocious power punch and blood-curdling exhaust note. All my cynicism over Hans Tanner’s 1959 figures is blasted away each time the 5000GT roars away. All that’s needed now is a Ferrari 500 Superfast for the ultimate supercoupé shootout. Agnelli had both, fitted with near-identical Pininfarina bodywork, but it’s not recorded which of them he enjoyed the most.

After this spectacular workout, we cut back on a twisty route to Capricorn’s workshops. Through the turns the long nose understeers when you enter too quickly, and the steering starts to feel sleepy. The short, flat seats also offer limited support through tight corners, but these are truly minor quibbles. Like so many Maseratis, this is a bargain compared with rival Ferraris, even after a hefty bill for sorting that wild motor. The king of super-exotic GT cars? No question. 

Scores on



the doors

Maserati's stylish luxury saloon
always had the edge on its four-
door rivals, but how does the
original Quattroporte compare
with the handsome fifth iteration?

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES MANN**



In 1963, the Maserati Quattroporte defined a new genre. Here, for the first time, was a four-door supercar energised by nothing less than a detuned Le Mans engine. It was handcrafted and, under its taut, businesslike lines, impossibly exotic and overqualified for its job.

Maserati was happy to hand-build a few dozen every year for a wealthy Euro-cool elite to whom the huge price-tag was of little consequence. A luxurious, air-conditioned saloon for Italy's new motorway network, quietly restrained and angularly elegant, it just happened to be the fastest four-door car in the world (at 143mph) – and it had no credible rivals. It was enough that it existed, and Maserati could charge whatever it liked.

The Quattroporte V, launched in 2003, enjoyed no such luxury: by that stage, the marketplace was awash with crushingly fast and luxurious saloons. Not only did the new Quattroporte have to be as devastatingly competent as an entire raft of Teutonic *über*-sedans – and Anglo-Americans such as the Jaguar XJR – it also had to justify its existence by offering something they didn't: an intangible sense of style and charisma that went beyond the superfluous hedonism that characterised the later Quattroportes of the '70s and '80s. The days of rucked leather and gold-plated drinking goblets had been consigned to history.

It had to be rare and exclusive, of course – not just anybody can drive a Quattroporte – but it had to be built at a volume and sold at a price that didn't restrict its clientele to a handful of aristocrats and refugees from a Martini advert. These Quattroportes were hand-assembled – much more efficiently than they had ever been before – by 500 workers in a rejuvenated factory on the via Ciro Menotti. Although sister company Ferrari supplied the V8 engines, it remained a separate place with a separate identity and a sense of pride.

The later car pictured here is an Executive GT, while the older Tipo 107 is the desirable, post-1965 second series. After 260 of the 260bhp, 4.2-litre Series 1 cars – with a de Dion rear axle and rectangular headlights – Maserati decided that a live axle could be made to behave just as well and go about its work more quietly, while being lighter and more compact. These cars, launched in 1965 with the option of a bigger, 290bhp 4.7-litre V8 and running through to 1970 and 510 examples, can be identified by quad circular lights (which the car had always had on the American market), and inside by wood trim on the fascia and door rails.

In either form, the Quattroporte I made virtually no impression on the British car market; *Autocar* thought 20 had been sold here when it published a belated design analysis of the model in November 1966, and only one is known to be alive and well in the UK. It's a sad fact that many Quattroportes were raided for parts to make 450S replicas. One owner in Britain was Peter Ustinov, who kept his until he died, while in Italy it appealed to the likes of actor Marcello Mastroianni.

The Quattroporte was clearly Italy's ultimate saloon. It had its imitators, but the likes of the Iso Fidia and De Tomaso Deauville would always be compromised by their reliance on American power units, even if they exuded

a similar kind of louche appeal. In truth, the Quattroporte was hardly any less of a mix-and-match job; Maserati technicians focused on the engine and were happy to raid the parts bins of the world for suspension, braking and drivetrain components. The Alford and Adler unequal-length wishbone suspension was essentially Jaguar in origin, as was the rear axle. Girling did the brakes (although the servos were Italian) and ZF made the steering and the manual gearbox, while Lucas supplied many of the electrical components. The chassis, however, was Maserati's own. For the first time, the traditionalist company eschewed its favoured tubular structure for a semi-monocoque collection of welded-up sheet-metal box-sections, upon which Vignale constructed the steel-panelled bodywork.

The all-alloy, wet-liner V8 engine sat in a separate subframe and, while it was directly derived from the 450S racer and 5000GT road car, it was comprehensively civilianised. Quiet chains replaced noisy gears for the camshaft drives, and the sump was wet rather than dry. While the road-car cylinder heads were machined from the same castings as the 5-litre racing heads, a single plug per cylinder was deemed adequate. Maserati kept the faith with Lucas injection on its six-cylinder models, but it felt safer with four double-choke Weber

38DCNL5 carburettors for the Quattroporte, willing to trade some edgy response for a smoother, more refined power delivery.

This car, former property of a general in the Italian air force but now owned by Maserati itself, has the desirable combination of five ZF speeds, power steering and the bigger engine. It's hard to conceive of a more alluring saloon than this if, like me, you have a weakness for boxy Italian cars of the '60s. You either get it or you don't. Essentially, Frua reinvented the style he created for the Aga Khan's 5000GT in a more harmonious four-door idiom. Dwarfed by the modern Quattroporte, it has an elegant and assured authority about its sculptured, assertive nose, its clean and generous glass area and that squared-off tail that tells you this is an important, expensive car.

Slide behind the wood-rimmed steering wheel and contemplate a dashboard that is almost a cliché of 1960s supercar chic. Seven instruments cluster in a taut, hooded binnacle; eight muscular flick-switches stride uncompromisingly – and entirely unidentified – across the middle of a rosewood fascia that puts you in mind of the decks of a Riva Aquarama. The pedals are large and butch in feel and appearance, the gearlever similarly substantial. Soft, sweet black leather contrasts nicely with chrome finishers to give the whole



Clockwise from above: instruments inlaid in rosewood dashboard; rich chrome door hardware; later, 4.7-litre quad-cam V8 makes 290bhp; cohesive chassis rides firmly but is effective; neat radio aerial on elegantly resolved tail





'It just happened to be the fastest saloon in the world, with no credible rivals. It was enough that it existed, and Maserati could charge whatever it liked'



MASERATI QUATTROPORTE I

Sold/number built 1963-'69/776

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4719cc V8, four Weber carburetors; 290bhp @ 5000rpm; 312lb ft @ 3800rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: **front** independent, by wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, leaf springs, anti-roll bar; telescopic dampers f/r **Steering** worm and sector, optional power assistance

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 6ft 5in (5000mm) **Width** 5ft

7¾in (1720mm) **Height** 4ft 5½in

(1360mm) **Wheelbase** 9ft ¼in

(2750mm) **Weight** 4034lb (1830kg)

0-60mph 8.7 secs

Top speed 143mph **Mpg** n/a

Price new £6000

MASERATI QUATTROPORTE V

Sold/number built 2003-'12/4032

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4244cc V8, electronic fuel injection; 400bhp @ 7000rpm; 333lb ft @ 4500rpm

Transmission six-speed semi-automatic, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by alloy double wishbones **rear** multi-link; coil springs, Skyhook adaptive dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes vented discs, with servo and ABS

Length 16ft 7in (5052mm) **Width** 6ft 2½in

(1895mm) **Height** 4ft 8½in (1438mm)

Wheelbase 10ft ½in (3064mm)

Weight 4343lb (1970kg)

0-60mph 5.2 secs

Top speed 170mph **Mpg** 18

Price new £74,550



cabin an aura of rich, sybaritic functionality.

The views out are stunning, particularly along the bonnet, from a commanding driving position. It feels special yet entirely usable. You can imagine taking your friends or your family out in this car – actually going somewhere in it – with plenty of space to lounge in the back and a large, regularly shaped boot.

Our first Quattroporte strides on to the highway as if it owns it, rushing forward on ample torque, the V8 excitingly symphonic but also cultured and smooth. A beautiful feeling of fine control about the throttle makes it easy to match downchanges against a well-judged blip. The change is heavy but pleasingly positive and mechanical, with a fairly short movement. The clutch is light, with a rather soft lining that won't suffer too much abuse. Acceleration is substantial rather than savage, sustaining thrust to 100mph with a lot more to come. It is pleasingly high-gearred and relaxed up there. The engine note drops to a mellow hum and the Quattroporte is stable and smooth, with brakes – four-wheel discs with dual servos – that never give cause for disquiet, being outstandingly powerful and easy to modulate.

Away from the *autostrada*, up in the mountains, the Tipo 107 behaves much better than its prosaic suspension arrangements lead you to expect. The power steering is wieldy – and the turning circle surprisingly tight – but not so detached that it can't tell you reassuring things about the restrained understeer that is the dominant characteristic. Your biggest problem is keeping your own stability on the slithery, shapeless seats. Broken asphalt and other distortions that you feel might upset the rear axle, with its high unsprung weight, are simply shrugged off. The ride is firm, but you are never that conscious of it.

The Quattroporte I is a fine exemplar of Maserati's '60s talent for making unremarkable chassis and suspension components behave remarkably well. It is certainly one of the world's great saloons, but it did not aspire to the technological prowess of the Mercedes 600 or even, in some respects, the Jaguar XJ6.

Its modern successor has to set its sights significantly higher. Visually, this version of the Quattroporte – the MkV – succeeds totally: it is one of the best-looking modern cars on the road. Pininfarina's style is pouting and muscular, bold and glamorous, in the way it captures the restrained exoticism of the '60s original, yet it has a poise all of its own. It picks up on 1950s styling cues but is no slavish retro-car and has none of the thuggishness that afflicts most modern big saloons. The Quattroporte V is assertive rather than aggressive, and has enormous presence.

Jump inside and the doors thunk shut, sealing you inside a cabin that is spacious if not a limousine – although, says Maserati, it proved to be a popular choice among government officials. The cabin aspires to that same look of restrained, masculine good taste as the '60s car and almost pulls it off. The hand-stitched leatherwork is impressively executed and the rosewood is elegant, but some of the details – such as the switchgear and the air-conditioning vents – just fail to lift it above the luxobarge rabble. In terms of labour-saving hedonism you could hardly want for more, with writing tables, adjustable rear seats and an electric



Clockwise from above: busy dash lacks earlier car's sophistication; ride can be noisy; strident 4.7 V8 provides strong thrust; capable chassis delivers fluid and agile handling; hand-stitched leather on steering wheel



blind for the rear window, to name just a few.

The four-cam, dry-sumped V8 fires with an edgy bark. Compact and lightweight, it is mounted well back in the chassis giving – with the rear-mounted transaxle – a 53% aft weight bias. Push the small T-handle on the centre console forward and Drive engages seamlessly before the Quattroporte moves forward, eager to surge into the Modena traffic. You can drive the DuoSelect in auto mode or use the paddle-shifters on the steering column, but either way it's a bit lurchy until you tune yourself into it, and even then it's never as smooth as a normal automatic.

Yet the Quattroporte has the urge to rocket you into another dimension above the mortals – and it sounds fabulous doing it, conveying the urgency and sophistication of the engine without being overpowering. It is never truly silent in the way of a Mercedes-Benz S-class or a BMW 7 Series, but you wouldn't want it to be. The acceleration is devastating and winds out vigorously to a 140mph cruising speed. Flat-out it will better 170mph.

In a sense, the modern car's ride quality is no more impressive, relatively, than that of the original: a little noisy and easily caught out by raised bumps, despite the claims Maserati makes for its Skyhook damping control, although you hear more than you feel.

In any case, the Maserati more than makes up for that in its handling. It is incredibly fluid and capable for something so large. Linking hairpins it carries its bulk lightly and, where other big saloons might be led by the nose, the Quattroporte is remarkably keen to change direction. In the mountains, the 'box makes a bit more sense, smoother in its changes when you elect to paddle through the gears manually.

Here, then, is a Quattroporte you could buy with your heart as well as with your head. It outsold the original several times over and, at £75,000, came at a bargain price compared with the insanely expensive first edition.

The original succeeded for Maserati, in a limited way, because it projected itself above the normal concerns of day-to-day saloon ownership. That it was surprisingly practical was merely a by-product; it appealed *because* it was absurdly exotic and expensive, not in spite of it. The Quattroporte V couldn't afford to take that attitude. It doesn't pretend to be an entirely rational choice, but had to justify itself on a practical level in a way the first car never did.

That it succeeds in all of these requirements seems like something of a miracle after degenerative years of the DeTomaso regime. For me it almost entirely recaptures the spirit of the 1960s car – making it easily the most desirable Maserati for three decades.



The Mistral and Ghibli marked a generational change for Maserati, but can the old 'six' match up to the mighty V8?

WORDS **ALASTAIR CLEMENTS** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

Bridging



the gap

Maserati of today, like most successful luxury marques, is all about brand extensions and exploiting high-net-worth niches. The market place of the late 1960s was a very different landscape, however, in which having a large range of costly-to-make, tricky-to-sell top-end cars wasn't great for the immediate bottom line or your long-term health prospects. So it comes as something of a surprise to peer at a 1969 price list and find, alongside the Quattroporte, not one but seven different flavours of Maserati two-door coupé, with prices ranging from £6871 to £10,180.

Look closer and you realise the cars that top and tail the list marked a changing of the guard at the Viale Ciro Menotti factory in the latter days of the Orsi era. Ever since the 6CM and its A6 sports-racing and roadgoing developments, the company's flagships both on and off the track had been powered by a gradually growing family of straight-six engines. By the early '60s,

however, it was becoming obvious that something new was needed, a powerplant exotic enough to be worthy of the illustrious name and powerful enough for Maserati's most exclusive models to stand comparison with the likes of Ferrari, Aston Martin and upstart Lamborghini. Enter a quad-cam V8 that, like the 'six' before it, would go on to power a whole dynasty of models, from supercoupés and saloons to mid-engined supercars.

Hold on, you may be thinking, you can't call the Ghibli the first of a new generation – after all, the V8 had been around since the turn of the decade in the 5000GT and Quattroporte. Perhaps not the first, then, but the aggressive, wedge-shaped GT was very much the poster-child for the engine that would be a mainstay for the firm through to the '80s and survive until the demise of the Quattroporte III in 1990.

Yet from 1967 to 1970 these two cars were sold from the same showrooms, offering well-heeled rich-kids and business magnates an intriguing choice. They were even targeting the same buyer: one seeking an exclusive, high-performance, handbuilt luxury two-seater.

The kind of GT car that would keep a Lamborghini Miura in sight on a cross-Continental blast, yet do so with sufficient space for a set of Louis Vuitton luggage and arrive without roasting its chic occupants or leaving them needing expensive osteopathy.

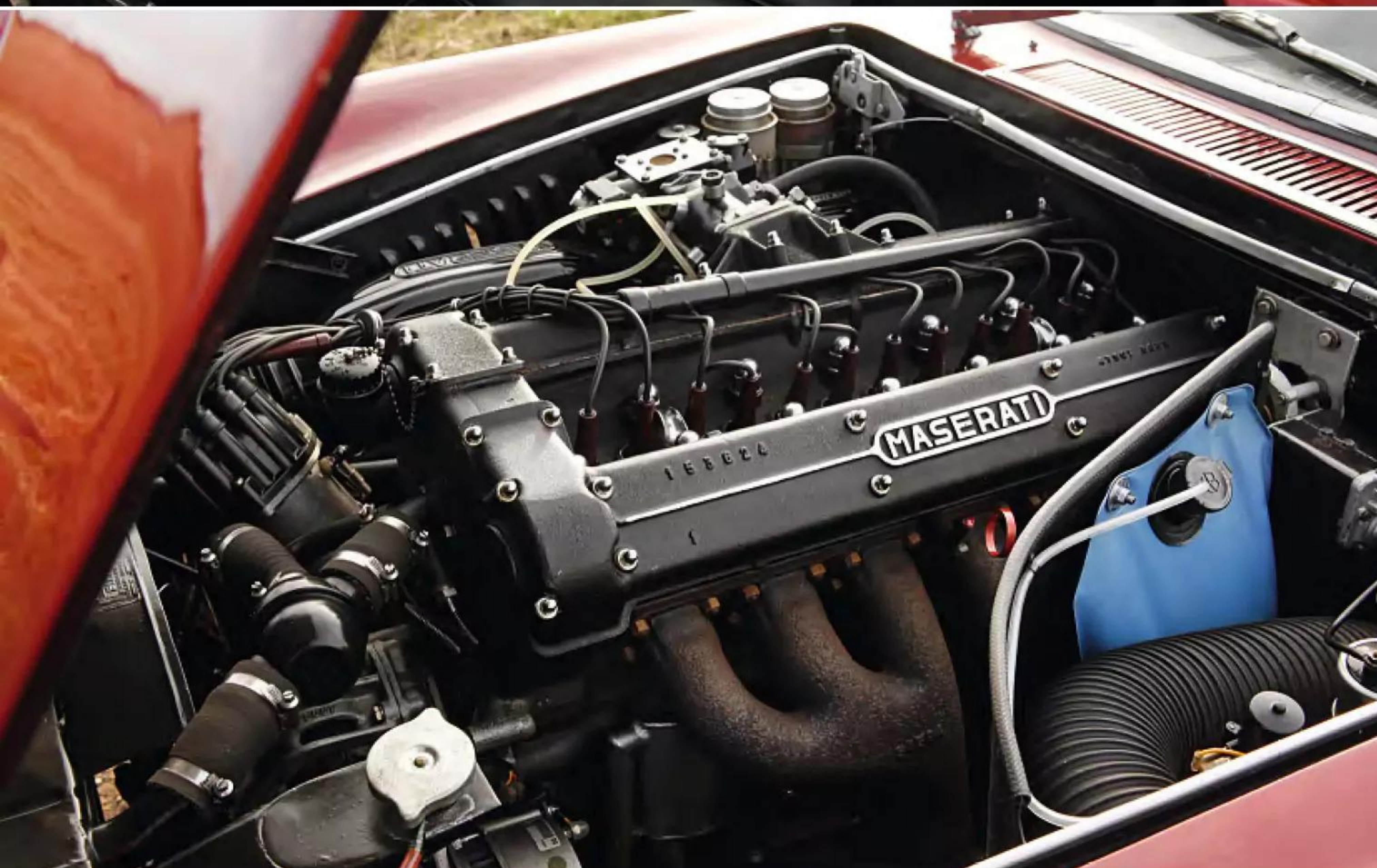
The Tipo AM109 fits all of these criteria admirably. So understated is this GT, introduced at the 1963 Turin Show, that it is hard to conceive that its engine is based – albeit fairly loosely – on that of the legendary 250F and 300S racers. For the road



Above, from top: details avoid being showy, with delicate chromed wing vents; non-standard Borrani – later cars could have Ghibli-style alloys; Mistral's discreet Trident badging



Non-standard Moto-Lita wheel adds to traditional feel. Below: alloy twin-cam 'six' looks and sounds every inch the thoroughbred



car, the focus was switched to tractability and reliability, with chain rather than gear drive for the double overhead cams and Lucas indirect mechanical injection replacing Weber carbs, but the family lineage was clear. The unit was directly developed from the 3500GT, but only a few Spyders would be 3.5 litres with most – such as this 1965 coupé – sporting a 245bhp, 3694cc version or, from 1966, the big 4-litre introduced at the Geneva Salon, the final evolution of the straight-six engine.

It is appropriate that thus far we haven't given it a name, because for a year the new Maserati was known simply as the *Berlina Due Posti* (two-seater saloon) before French importer Colonel John Simone set a trident trend by suggesting it be called Mistral after a coastal Mediterranean wind. There isn't even a badge on this car, the burgundy coachwork of which perfectly accentuates the subtle Pietro Frua-styled lines. Frua had been a popular choice for the fickle Maserati during the A6G era, and for the short-wheelbase Mistral – the 3500GT had an additional 100mm between the axles – he created a pretty hatchback coupé

shape that was formed in aluminium by fellow Torinese *carrozzeria* Maggiora.

The first Maserati road car to do without a traditional front grille, the Mistral's air intake was beneath the bumper and there were delicate chrome accents for the wing vents and fuel-filler. The detailing is fussy, almost awkward in places, but the whole is a visual treat, with a continuous line running under the headlights, over the wheelarches and beneath the fabulous glass tailgate.

But style was only a part of the Maserati package during the golden era under chief engineer Giulio Alfieri, who joined in 1953. Comfort and performance were equally important, and the former certainly hasn't been forgotten. The driving position is upright, the pedals offset slightly to the right, but the seats are deeply padded and there is a charmingly traditional feel. The leather-clad dash is fronted by a large, clear instrument binnacle and there are delightful handcrafted details such as little lever-operated vents in the footwells. Behind, there's a vast boot – into which, as with the Ghibli, you could specify

MARKET WATCH*

ANDY HEYWOOD, McGRATH MASERATI

"Prices have been climbing for several years, but they have really accelerated recently. We first noticed a hardening of values of really good cars, but now that has filtered down through the whole market. The Ghibli is the more commercially desirable because it's such an iconic shape, whereas Mistrals are not so accessible – people only tend to get into them after learning about Maserati in depth.

"Ghiblis have gone from around £40k for a really good one seven years ago to £120k today. A well-restored SS is £150k and a Spyder £½m-plus. The Mistral market has changed relatively quickly and dealers are preying on them, but some haven't caught up so you do still see them in the £30,000s. Five years ago that would have got you a nice car; now it'll be a non-runner. In the 1980s the Mistral Spyder was the car, but now the Ghibli has overtaken it and the 3500GT Spyder is the most coveted of all. A good Mistral coupé today is £100k – add £30k for one of the late 4-litres – while a Spyder is £250-300k.

"For me, it has to be a Ghibli: I just love the shape, and some of my best journeys have been in Ghiblis. A 4.9 SS with power steering is a car you can go just about anywhere in."



*PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

MASERATI MISTRAL

Sold/number built 1963-'70/828
(all, plus 125 Spyders)

Construction aluminium body, steel platform chassis

Engine all-alloy, dohc, twin-plug 3694/3485/4014cc straight-six, with Lucas mechanical fuel injection

Max power 245bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 275lb ft @ 3600rpm

Transmission ZF five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering worm and sector

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 14ft 9¼in (4500mm)

Width 5ft 5¾in (1675mm)

Height 4ft 3¼in (1300mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 10½in (2400mm)

Weight 3152lb (1430kg)

0-60mph 6.2 secs

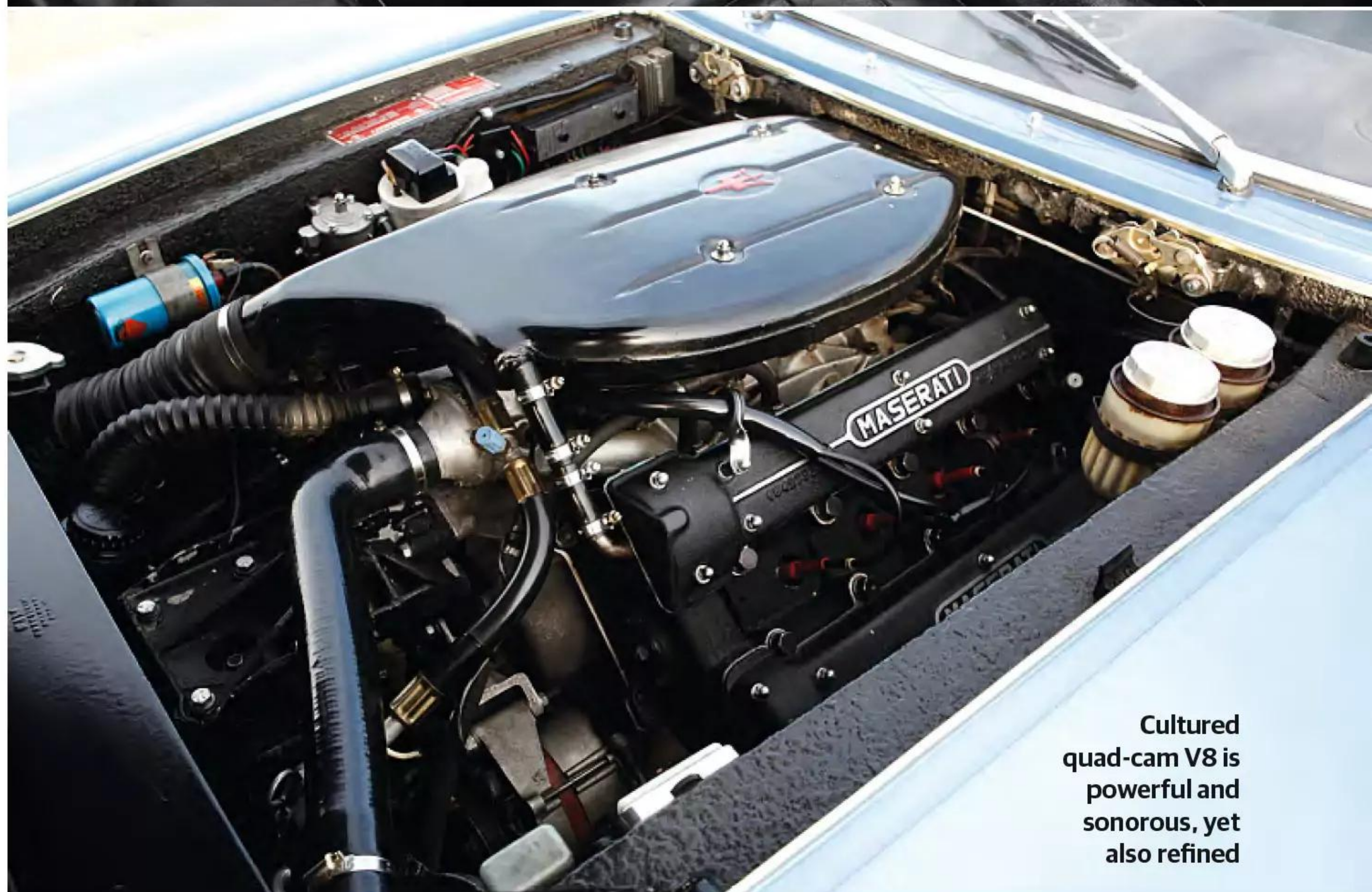
Top speed 155mph **Mpg** 14

Price new £6871 (1969)

Below, from top: lovely shape was made metal by Ghia; Campagnolo alloys with fake centre-lock caps; sparing use of chrome lifts the black leather



Ghibli cabin is as modern and stylish as the exterior



Cultured quad-cam V8 is powerful and sonorous, yet also refined

a couple of jump-seats in later cars – and that focus on comfort is further reinforced by an options list that included air-conditioning and even a three-speed automatic transmission.

Tick that last box, however, and you would be missing the point. It is a comfortable GT, but it's also a car with true thoroughbred breeding. To bring it to life, leave the throttle alone and use the cold-start to avoid flooding the injection; after a churn, that glorious straight-six bursts into life, rumbling unevenly until it warms, then ticking over with the dieselly grumble of the gear drive from the crank to the cam chains.

The Lucas fuel injection doesn't have a great reputation for reliability, but when it's right you can't imagine ever swapping it for Webers. There are no histrionics, and the fantastic torque means that the twin-cam, twin-plug motor pulls from walking pace without a cough, delivering a sustained surge that has pretty much given its best by 4500rpm – still some 1000rpm short of the redline. The ZF gearchange isn't particularly fast, and ideally you want to leave second alone until it's warm, but the tiny lever snicks across the gate with

a deliciously mechanical precision. Yet the real treat is the soundtrack: it's no fire-breather, but you can feel – and hear – all of that Grand Prix heritage in its raucous bark. Close your eyes and you could be in the Goodwood paddock.

Barrelling along twisty rural Cambridgeshire roads, there is a touch of wander from the low-g geared steering – the box may need adjusting – but it's beautifully weighted, smooth and accurate, quickly shedding its low-speed heft. The payoff for a supple ride is some roll, but it remains composed under most conditions, only upset by mid-corner ruts that show up the live rear axle with a hop and a skip. Like a '50s GT, the Mistral likes to move around on its relatively skinny 6.00x16in rear tyres, but it always encourages enthusiasm with its agile, eager responses.

Stepping from the upright Mistral and dropping into the low-set, reclined seat of the Ghibli, it's hard to believe that both came from the same maker at the same time – although the name is a good clue, taken this time from a hot, dry North African wind. It's as if the world around you is in fast-forward, moving

from a machine that feels rooted in the '50s to one whose focus is clearly the approaching '70s. The later car feels more of-a-piece than the Mistral, albeit at the cost of seeming a touch less bespoke. Inside, just as without, it feels more rational, less random, with consistent detailing that is beautifully executed to hide any parts-bin raiding. And there was plenty of that to ensure that there was every luxury, from air-con to electric windows.

The Tipo AM115 was launched at Turin in 1966 – but with few customers getting their cars until late '67 – and was arguably the first overtly showy Maserati. Earlier cars had plenty of chrome, yes, but appeared almost apologetic about their ostentation, while the gorgeous Ghibli shouted its potency and luxury from the rooftops thanks to the precocious talents of a youthful Giorgetto Giugiaro at Ghia.

The futuristic wedge with pop-up lamps appears unfeasibly low: muscular without being brash, it has minimal chrome yet the overall effect is far more extravagant. That Giugiaro was able to get it so ground-hugging is testament to the work of the engineers: the

four-cam V8 was loosely based on that of the exotic 5000GT, itself a development of the hairy 450S sports-racer's V8, but for the Ghibli it was further civilised with single plugs, a quartet of twin-choke Webers – 42DCNFs on this 1969 example – and, crucially, dry-sump lubrication to allow that super-low bonnet line.

Unlike the Miura and Daytona against which it was inevitably compared, the Ghibli's spec was otherwise largely unexciting: it persevered with a cart-sprung live rear end, with only an anti-tramp bar to help keep it in check. Yet it was both potent and forgiving – and fast. Even in 4.7-litre form it mustered 310bhp, and the mighty 4.9-litre SS – up-engined to mask the effect of Federal emissions regulations – had 335bhp, making it at the time Maserati's fastest road car to date. In spite of its racer origins, the V8 produces a more refined, more cultured sound than the Mistral – and a far more exotic timbre than a pushrod V8 as it spins freely with a complex symphony of moving parts meshing in perfect harmony.

Some of that power is masked by the additional 220kg of the all-steel, Vignale-built body, which reduces the gap between the two cars to just 10bhp/tonne, but the Ghibli still feels the faster. In fact, it feels more capable all round: the vented discs inspire confidence; the fatter tyres and 2in-wider track give a huge boost in grip and balance; and that additional weight helps it seem more stable, quashing with authority bumps that might upset the lighter, nimbler Mistral.

Hustling this Ghibli is a physical experience without the power-assisted steering more commonly specified on later cars, but, despite the weight of the helm and the hefty, long-throw ZF gearchange, the Ghibli feels instantly familiar. You sit so low beneath that shallow

glasshouse that it's tricky to judge the corners – even for a six-foot driver – but perhaps the biggest drawback on these narrow lanes is the car's sheer width, its additional 5in over the Mistral making passing kamikaze local buses a nerve-racking experience.

Wind back to 1969, then, and which car does our wealthy buyer pick? The cost differential means nothing to them – other than adding to the sense of the Ghibli being a bit more flash than the almost self-consciously discreet Mistral. On a purely objective basis, the Ghibli wins hands-down. It's the prettier shape, the more complete and capable GT – and for most that is more than enough. For all of its obvious sexiness, however, it somehow lacks some of the romance of the earlier car, and it's the Mistral that lingers longer in the heart. It may not be the better car, but for a true romantic it's the better Maserati.

Thanks to owners Mark Guterres and Brian Harris; McGrath Maserati (mcgrathmaserati.co.uk); Longstone Classic Tyres (longstonetyres.co.uk)



MASERATI GIBLI

Sold/number built 1967-'73/1170 (all, plus 125 Spyders)

Construction steel body, steel ladder chassis
Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4709/4930cc dry-sump 90° V8, with four Weber carburettors

Max power 310bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque 341lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission ZF five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering worm and sector

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 15ft 5in (4700mm)

Width 5ft 10½in (1790mm)

Height 3ft 9½in (1160mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 4½in (2550mm)

Weight 3637lb (1650kg)

0-60mph 6.4 secs

Top speed 174mph **Mpg** 18

Price new £10,180 (1969)

Sleek, wedge-shaped lines are the work of Giorgetto Giugiaro at the peak of his abilities



Whistle down



the wind

With fabulous, Frua-penned lines
and a Grand Prix-inspired engine, the
underrated Maserati Mistral Spyder
deserves a place among the exotic elite

WORDS ALASTAIR CLEMENTS PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES MANN



“**B**argain.” It’s a word that gets bandied around all too often when talking classic cars. We’re guilty of it here at C&SC, and I’m afraid you are not going to get through the next few pages without reading it again. It seems anathema to refer to a car as expensive as this as a bargain, yet, in the pantheon of super-exotic 1960s machinery, the Maserati Mistral Spyder remains – bizarrely – overlooked.

Which means it’s cheaper than drop-top versions of both its 3500 predecessor and Ghibli successor, not to mention its period rivals. You won’t get an open Aston for anywhere near the same money, yet the pretty Maserati is sweeter to drive, has arguably the better pedigree and is, frankly, rather more exotic. At the 1966 Earls Court Motor Show, the then-dated British GT was £700 cheaper than the Mistral, whose order form demanded £5784 including Purchase Tax. No wonder the *Daily Express Review* called it ‘Millionaire motoring by Maserati’.

Today, though the price is a touch more affordable, the Mistral’s allure remains every bit as strong. It may not have a dozen cylinders, but few can argue with the provenance of an engine descended from one of the most successful – and beautiful – Grand Prix cars of all time. And in the metal it looks almost impossibly glamorous, a sensation that’s only enhanced by the fact that it’s a Maserati. There’s little doubt that the marque’s prestige has been diluted over the past quarter-century by a stream of decidedly questionable models. In the 1960s, however, the lesser-known of the Modenese marques carried a unique cachet among its exclusive rivals: more exotic than

an Aston Martin, yet without the brashness of a Lamborghini or the ‘look at me’ air of a Ferrari.

The prototype of Maserati’s new GT appeared at Turin in November 1963, then just called the *Due Posti* (two-seater), with the Spyder following at Geneva the following spring. By that stage it had a proper name, Mistral – not Mistrale, as the British motoring press of the time universally misspelled it – suggested by French importer Colonel Simon. It’s the title given to the cool, dry wind that blows down the Rhône valley towards the Mediterranean: perhaps Simon hoped he would reap the benefits of a stream of new Maseratis flowing into southern France.

And for those who think the Tipo 109 is just a clone of the AC 428, think again. At a glance the two Pietro Frua designs appear similar, but the longer you spend looking at the Mistral, the further it distances itself from the British hybrid. It’s perhaps a touch fussier, but also slimmer, better proportioned and beautifully detailed: the distance between Thames Ditton and Modena can be measured in more than just miles. There are exquisite flourishes everywhere: the crisp, uninterrupted line that runs from beneath the headlights to the top of the Kamm-style tail; the chrome-lipped air intakes; the teardrop side repeaters; and the intricate rain guttering that tops the quarterlights. Everywhere you look there’s the delicate touch of the *carrozzeria*, the expensive feel of a money-no-object brief, not to mention sublime fit and finish – not a statement you could level at later Maserati offerings.

And it was expensive. A fact not lost on director Robert Parish when casting a four-wheeled lead for his 1967 Peter Sellers/Britt Ekland movie *The Bobo*. “They say one needs

MASERATI MISTRAL 4000

Sold/number built 1963-'70/120

(all Spyders, plus 828 coupés)

Construction steel box-section chassis, steel body with aluminium panels

Engine all-alloy, dohc 4014cc straight-six, Marelli twin-plug ignition and Lucas injection

Max power 255bhp @ 5200rpm

Max torque 283lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission ZF five-speed manual, RWD via Salisbury differential (optional three-speed automatic and limited-slip differential)

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, radius arms; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering Burman recirculating ball

Brakes Dunlop discs, with servo

Length 14ft 6in (4420mm)

Width 5ft 4½in (1636mm)

Height 4ft 2in (1270mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2in (2489mm)

Weight 2866lb (1300kg)

0-60mph 6.8 secs

Top speed 160mph **Mpg** 17-20

Price new £7150 (1969)



The ride improves with load in the suspension. Above: upstaging Britt Ekland and Rossano Brazzi in Peter Sellers vehicle *The Bobo*





Clockwise from above: dash is restrained and elegant; last cars came with Ruote Borrani alloys as used on the Ghibli; prolific trident badging; little roll and strong grip; evocative 'six' traces its roots back to the 250F



two things to own a Maserati: money and patience," explains the caddish Carlos Matabosch (Rossano Brazzi) to beautiful Olimpia Segura (Ekland). Segura's love for a Mistral Spyder spotted in a Barcelona car dealership leads her into all manner of deception to get her hands on it without the reputed nine-month wait and 800,000-peseta price-tag most customers expected to endure.

But lose the silver-screen soft focus and there is a sharp purpose to the Mistral's engineering that goes far beyond the exotic engine spec. The Maggiore-built body is lean and, thanks to the adoption of aluminium for the opening panels, relatively light. It sits low on the chassis, itself an exercise in lightening by engineer Giulio Alfieri, with a 4in-shorter wheelbase than the 3500 and a simpler box-section frame in place of the earlier model's tubular affair. Together they add up to a 70kg weight saving over the Mistral's Sebring sibling.

The real gem, however, was shared by both cars. Lift the bonnet and you're greeted by a scene straight out of the Goodwood Revival paddock. A dozen spark plugs nestle between crackle-black cam covers, with a spaghetti of leads twirling forwards to the terrifying complexity of the twin-points Marelli distributor. Gone are the dry sump and gear-driven cams of the racing engines – this straight-six is a direct descendant of the unit

found in the ill-fated 350S of 1956, itself a development of the 250F powerplant – but the hemispherical combustion chambers remain and capacity has been significantly increased.

From launch, the Mistral was available in 235bhp 3485cc form, but most sport the bored-out 245bhp 3693cc version. From 1966, some – including David Newling Ward's fabulous Spyder – had the final 4014cc motor, boasting a very healthy 255bhp and a generous 283lb ft of torque. But the biggest change over its 250F ancestor is the plenum chamber for the Lucas fuel injection – as used by Triumph for its 2.5 PI and TR5/6. Productionised for the 3500GTi of 1961, fuel injection was pioneered for road use by Maserati, which had experimented with it in racing cars as far back as 1956.

From behind the compact, wood-rimmed Secura wheel, the only hint to the technology in front of you is the Lucas ammeter that, rather incongruously, joins a full set of British-made

'The Maserati draws great swathes of Berkshire beneath its grille. There's no sudden burst, just a seamless, muscular shove'

instruments – the others by Smiths – all perfectly arranged in the logical instrument pod. Above them, the hand-clap wipers are parked at the base of a slim-framed, steeply raked 'screen that drops to the sweeping expanse of bonnet. The view out is good thanks to leather bucket seats that feel a touch too high, yet offer more support than you expect of a '60s GT. The finish, however, is just as you'd hope: understated, elegant and flawlessly executed. Soft black leather lines every inch of the cabin, with discreet chrome highlights: no wonder Britt was so keen to chop in her Triumph Spitfire for the fantasy Maserati.

To find out whether the film's sound effects are genuine – surprisingly, on this occasion it seems they were – slide the tiny ignition key into the barrel set on the far right-hand side of the dashboard and give a brief twist to the right. Immediately the benefits of a properly set up Lucas fuel-injection system begin to reveal themselves. At tickover, and rolling along at tiny throttle openings, the Mistral is docile in a way you don't expect of a race-derived engine – particularly one of such complexity. For those who think that's down to the motor itself, bear in mind that those who ditch the notoriously tricky Lucas feed in favour of a trio of Webers will find it a rather more lumpy beast.

Oddly, at least for a thoroughbred engine, the redline is low – it starts at 5000rpm – yet you

rarely need to stretch it that far. Cruising through quintessentially English countryside, occasionally flashing through villages, the Maserati is content to be swept along on a surging current of torque. It's a feature of every Mistral, but the large swept volume of the 4-litre incarnation results in effortless urge from just above tickover that makes it perfectly tractable at 1200-1500rpm when required for the numerous 30mph speed limits. But there is a wild side always ready to be unleashed as you pass the familiar black-and-white sign, drop a ratio – always a joy with the light clutch and slick, short-throw ZF five-speeder – and bury the heavy organ-pedal throttle. A raw edge comes into the blaring note from those subtle twin exhausts, and the Maserati starts to draw great swathes of Berkshire beneath its trident-crested grille. There's no sudden burst, no coming on cam, just a seamless, muscular shove. An upchange at 4000rpm – plenty to get your knuckles whitening on the wheel – brings more of the same. Owner David says it feels just as strong at 120mph, making the reputed 150mph-plus top end appear within reach.

But perhaps the greatest Mistral revelation is that it's not just a great engine in search of a better home. The whole very much lives up to its most expensive part. The planned 350S-style de Dion rear end was ditched during development, but the conventional live axle – located by trailing arms – works well. There's a certain amount of bump-thump at posing speeds, but it disappears as soon as there is some proper compression in the suspension and the Maserati flows incredibly fluidly with the road. The sense of setting the all-alloy 'six' far back in the engine bay and moving ancillaries such as the battery into the boot is also immediately obvious: as soon as you get up to walking pace the steering is light and fluent, and the chassis balance is magnificent. This is no verge-magnet understeerer like so many heavy GTs: push past the high limits of the

215/70 VR15 Michelin XWX radials and it tends towards gentle, easily corrected oversteer.

All the while, there is a delicious blend of cam-chain thrash, distributor chatter, exhaust bark and the distinctive thrum of the mechanical fuel injection. From without there's still enough 250F genes for a double-take as the Mistral approaches: you expect to see 1957 World Champ Juan Manuel Fangio sawing expertly at the wheel of a cigar-shaped scarlet racer. Instead it's an elegant Spyder – still scarlet, but in nothing so undignified as a four-wheel drift.

In 1968 this was the ideal machine for an ageing Riviera industrialist, three divorces down and still partying hard at the poolside, where a past meeting with Fangio is regularly dropped into conversations about the exotic roadster. Although it looks at home outside a Monégasque pad, it's also the perfect tool for a blast back over the Alps – the new Mont Blanc Tunnel is too dark and dank – to check on the Milanese industrial empire. For these buyers, the Ghibli and its ilk that followed lessened the marque's appeal. The Mistral was the last of the old guard, the racer turned glamourpuss, before the onset of the '70s and the swing from track to road, and excess to profit.

Talking of profit, from the doldrums of the early noughties this ultra-desirable machine – of just 120 Spyders, just a tenth were right-hand drive and it's thought that this example is the only one to feature a 4-litre powerplant – has at last begun to be recognised by the classic marketplace. Yet its coupé twin remains even more criminally undervalued, with projects still occasionally slipping through the auction houses for the price of a dull family saloon. Maserati's last great straight-six GT for a fifth of the price of an equivalent Aston Martin? Now that's what I call a bargain. 

Thanks to Bearwood Lakes Golf Club (0118 979 7900; bearwoodlakes.co.uk) and Simon Park

OWNER'S VIEW DAVID NEWLING WARD

Four years ago, David had a good reason for buying his super-rare Mistral Spyder 4000. He says: "I had an AC 428

convertible and loved the shape, but the engine was so heavy that it was a trial to drive any distance. When this came up I grabbed it. It's remarkable how well it drives for a car of its age – it feels much lighter than the 428, it's beautifully balanced and the steering is stunning: it just dances around corners, plus it makes a wonderful sound."

What about reliability? "I bought it restored, but the Lucas fuel injection wasn't going superbly," he says. "Once set up it was fantastic, and it has been running beautifully for three years now. Like most Italian cars of the era it's temperamental, but I haven't had much trouble. I've been to Angoulême and on a club rally to Epernay: it's a fabulous touring car because it has so much luggage space."



Spyder makes a fine tourer, with big boot and spacious rear shelf. Above right: intricate fluted tail-light lenses





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Playthings for grown-ups

Today, as in the 1960s, we all have to grow up at some point. But happily, you can retain your hedonistic lifestyle via these 2+2s from Aston Martin, Ferrari and Maserati

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



According to my 1966 *Autocar Buyer's Guide*, only 30 new cars offered in the UK that year commanded in excess of £3000. Thus, owning an Aston Martin DB6, Ferrari 330GT or Maserati Sebring put you in an elite group prepared to pay up to double that for a means of transport when £400 bought a new Fiat 500. But then they were not mere means of transport: glamour, luxury, bullish straight-line urge and thoroughbred manners made them the most exciting possible way of transporting four people. In the exclusive world of 150mph, 300bhp 2+2 GTs, this trio represented more handcrafted status and finely honed mystique than anything on the road. These were no glossy Euro-American interlopers of uncertain lineage; Aston Martin, Maserati and Ferrari still conjured imagery of oil-stained aces and the romance of racing, where the power and stamina of their straight-six and V12 engines had been proven. Such muscular yet ruggedly conventional engineering filtered directly down to the GTs customers could drive.

These cars were among the first exotics to be produced in volume rather than sporadic batches. Ferrari built more than 1000 330GTs in four years, Aston Martin a surprising 1567 DB6s. At 438 examples between 1962 and '68 the Sebring is rarer, but Maserati believed in variety and made nearly 1000 mechanically identical Mistrals at around the same time.

In an age when supercars are as ubiquitous as overpaid footballers, it is important to remember the jaw-dropping impact the 330, Sebring and DB6 would have made when encountered on the road 40 years ago. Only a few dozen people a year in Britain – the usual slew of popstars and plutocrats – could afford to own such exotica. The requirements of those buyers, people who wanted to use their cars in the real world of city driving as well as on the big new highways of Europe, were changing the character of exotic cars. Luxuries such as power steering, air conditioning and electric windows were becoming the norm, adding weight almost as quickly as engineers could boost power. You could say these were among the first supercars that had been designed to satisfy a market rather than simply dictating it. An automatic Ferrari might still have been unthinkable in 1966, but both Maserati and Aston Martin were cheerfully churning out auto versions of the Sebring and DB6.

More importantly, the idea of providing four proper seats came of age in the mid-1960s, as designers became more willing to manage the packaging compromises intelligently. The Maserati is a little too cosy in the back to qualify as a true four-seater, but slide on to the sculpted rear bench of the Ferrari 330GT or into an Aston Martin DB6 and you could remain reasonably comfortable on a longer journey.

'Our' 330GT is a four-headlight car, as originally conceived by Tom Tjaarda while at Pininfarina. Peter Bennett has owned it for two years after seeing it in *C&SC*. He explains: "I always wanted a V12 front-engined Ferrari and the 330GT is good value, having more or less the same mechanical and chassis specifications as earlier, much more expensive models. Compared with previous cars I have



Rear seats usable. Above: driving position squeezed to accommodate them



330GT is sweet-handling - note quad headlights on this pre-'65 example

'The 330 is a clumsy car in traffic, with a choppy ride and heavy steering, but stride out on to faster roads and it comes to life'



had, it is closest to a Gordon-Keeble and a DB4."

For me it's not the prettiest Ferrari, but with its wide grille and frowning countenance it has a powerful presence and, on balance, I prefer the four-headlight look to the twin lights of the post-1965 cars. Inside, you do feel that the driving position has been compromised to accommodate the rear seats. It is offset to the awkwardly bunched, floor-hinged pedals (later models had hanging pedals), and it's hard to strike a good balance between an excessively straight-armed position and not feeling as if you are straining to depress the clutch, which demands that you push it down its full length.

The front seats are slim and look suspiciously Lancia Flavia/Flaminia Coupé in origin, as does much of the Ferrari's minor interior furniture. Looking along the bonnet, which descends between those aggressively angled quad lights, you are continually peering over the bulky instrument binnacle, its dull wood sheen having the appearance of a mid-range

coffin. But the steering wheel is big and handsome, as are the Veglia instruments. Above you, the deeply quilted headlining is classically 1960s Pininfarina.

Hot or cold the V12 catches right away on a starter motor that sounds like a bacon slicer. The 330 is a clumsy car in traffic, where the ride seems quite choppy and the steering heavy, with very little lock and requiring lots of twirling to negotiate suburban corners. Using 4 litres and 300bhp to shift 3000lb-plus no longer feels quite as miraculous as it did in the 1960s, and the 330GT at first feels impressively urgeful rather than awesome.

Stride out on to faster roads and it comes to life. Superb torque and well-chosen ratios give the Ferrari a sense of momentum that can still squirt you past a whole line of day-trippers in a blur of flashing Borranis. The gearchange is meatily positive, rewarding well-timed downshifts with a longish but beautifully smooth action. Fourth and overdrive, which cancels automatically when you change down to third, are all the gears you need to get along very smartly. Five speeds came in after 1965, but the overdrive is quite impressive to use. In direct fourth, the 330 steams effortlessly with that polished turbine hum and easily sails into three figures as your right hand flicks the spring-loaded overdrive switch. Settling into a relaxed cruise, with only wind hiss around the quarterlights to spoil the refinement, 100mph is about 4000rpm, and there is every indication that the 330 will keep accelerating

FERRARI 330GT

Sold/number built 1964-'67/1075

Construction tubular steel chassis, steel body

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 3967cc 60°

V12, three twin-choke Weber 40DCZ/6 carbs

Max power 300bhp @ 6600rpm

Max torque 288lb ft @ 5000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual with overdrive on top (five-speed from '65), RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, radius rods, semi-elliptic leaf springs, auxiliary coil springs; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering ZF worm and roller (optional power assistance on later cars)

Brakes Dunlop discs, with twin servos

Length 15ft 9½in (4840mm)

Width 5ft 7½in (1715mm)

Height 4ft 5½in (1365mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 8¼in (2650mm)

Weight 3040lb (1380kg)

0-60mph 7.4 secs

Top speed 152mph **Mpg** 15

Price new £6217 (1964)

Tight-fitting roofline hints at less spacious interior – Sebring has least room in the back



with vigour to something like the advertised 150mph. It plots a completely straight and stable course as you accelerate towards the horizon on that irresistible surge of torque.

It was only in later transaxle Ferraris that the rest of the car started to live up to the excellence of the engine, but that isn't to say the 330GT is a truck. Steering that seemed heavy and sluggish at lower speeds transforms when you delve into the performance, the understeer is swept away and you realise that the 330GT retains iron control of its body movements, which is just as well because the seats are slippery. Bumps in the road kick back hard through the steering wheel and make the live rear axle get fidgety and thumpy, but generally the ride levels out nicely. The brakes, with their dual servos, have a solid pedal and good initial bite, but feel wooden when you explore the full extent of their travel.

In some respects the charisma of the Ferrari's V12 does rather overshadow the other two cars, but there are compensations, particularly in the case of the Maserati. The Sebring is the prettiest of the three, a neat and simple, Vignale-built steel body penned by Giovanni Michelotti. First seen in 1962, it was technically contemporary with the five-speed, disc-braked, Touring-bodied 3500GTi, but Lucas injection was standardised on the Sebring at the Geneva show in 1963. This post-1965 S2 Sebring has a longer-stroke 3694cc version of the twin-cam 'six' that is good for 245bhp at 5500rpm. It was visually tweaked to align with Frua's Quattroporte saloon, using the same headlight trims and indicator/lamp units flanking a slimmer grille. The angular rear wore Quattroporte-style tail-lights.

The whole aura of this car leaves you with an impression of a build quality that is more meticulous than the Ferrari's, which has a few rough edges. The cabin is a subtle blend of chrome, leather and crackle-black textures, with macho instrumentation mixing with pretty 'Guinness bottle' toggles. The pedals are chunky and emerge at a disconcerting angle,



Above, from top: Lucas fuel injection swapped for Weber carbs on this car; subtly stylish cabin. Below: rear end apes the Quattroporte I



but getting comfortable is no problem. The roofline is squat, the pillars are slender and the car feels pleasantly airy.

The attractive straight-six engine – now converted to Webers on this car – has 12 spark plugs. It starts easily and idles at 600rpm with a strangely gruff edge. It has neither the refinement nor the aggression of the Ferrari unit, but it strikes a satisfying balance between lusty flexibility and free-spinning response, despite a redline marked at a modest 5000rpm. It is very strong from 3500rpm, and zipping along an A-road feels natural and effortless, with a rich thrum from the tailpipes. The rebuilt ZF gearbox in this car is an absolute pleasure, the gears hitting home smoothly and quietly with a short lever that is spring-loaded in favour of third and fourth. In fifth, the Sebring is truly long-legged and confidently stable, with rather less wind noise than the Ferrari. The beautiful wood-rimmed wheel feels fragile when you start to heave on it, but it adjusts in and out on its central boss.

Like the Ferrari, the Maserati has hardly any lock for manoeuvring, but once on the move

much of the weight disappears, and, although fairly low-g geared, it has a smooth action that suggests a refined mechanism and the gearing almost seems to get faster as you wind on lock. It is more isolating and forgiving of bumpy corners than its fellow Italian, and its axle movements are better controlled, but it does plunge a little at the front. Andy Leery bought the Sebring as a 40th birthday present “from myself to myself” in 2001. “I drove it all the way back from Modena through the Alps listening to Tony Christie and *The Italian Job* soundtrack,” he says. “I love it. It’s won the Maserati Club concours five times, and I just take it to McGrath Maserati every 18 months or so for a service.”

Where does this leave the Aston Martin? The

“I drove it back from Modena through the Alps listening to Tony Christie and Matt Monro”

aim of the alloy-bodied DB6, launched at Earls Court in 1965, was to give true rear seats in a car that is only 2in longer than a DB5. That was the appeal for John Cook, who has owned this car since 1984. “We had little kids at the time so the room in the back was good,” he says. “It’s done 47,000 miles and has always been a ‘toy’, though I do take it shopping occasionally, and it had a full body rebuild at Works Service in 1992.”

The Aston Martin’s familiarity means that it generates less excitement in this rarefied Italian company, but it is still handsome. That’s even if you don’t think 4in of extra wheelbase, a taller roofline and the Kamm tail sit easily on what is a late-’50s design. Mechanically, too, the DB6 was the same mix as before: a 4-litre, all-alloy, twin-cam straight-six coming as standard with triple SUs and 282bhp or, at no extra cost, as a Vantage with triple Webers coaxing out 325bhp. Plus, of the three cars here the Aston has the most sophisticated means of locating its live rear axle, by trailing arms (reduced in length to get a wide rear seat) and a Watt linkage. It’s also the only one of the three to have power-assisted steering.



Hints of 5000GT can be seen in the Sebring's frontal treatment

MASERATI SEBRING

Sold/number built 1962-'66/438

Construction steel box-section chassis, steel body with aluminium bonnet and bootlid

Engine all-alloy, dohc 3485/3693/4014cc straight-six, Lucas fuel injection

Max power 220-265bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 254-283lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission five-speed ZF manual or three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: **front** independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, radius arms; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes Girling discs, with servo

Length 14ft 8in (4470mm)

Width 5ft 5in (1651mm)

Height 4ft 6in (1372mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 8½in (2654mm)

Weight 2976lb (1350kg)

0-60mph 8.4 secs

Top speed 146mph (3.7) **Mpg** 18

Price new £5486 (1965)



Clockwise from main: DB6 is only 2in longer than DB5, but has decent rear seats; triple SUs were standard - Vantage had three Webers; neutral handling; interior's 'military sense of purpose'



After the slinky driving positions of the Italian cars, you feel as if you sit on rather than in the Aston. It is a darker, more private place and the combination of glorious-smelling dark leather and smart chrome instrumentation gives the cabin an almost military sense of purpose. There is a charming view along the shapely nose, but vision to the rear is compromised by the fat C-pillars. In terms of fixtures and fittings the DB6 is the most neatly finished and detailed of the three, the essentials basically unchanged since the DB4.

The engine, SU-fed in this instance, burbles provocatively at tickover, has a smooth growl under load and is cheerfully flexible or assertive on command, boosting you to nearly 70mph in second. It is a friendly, practical car that is easy to drive whether you want to go quickly or slowly. A little linkage wear means you can get lost in the ZF gearbox, but the lever usually snicks neatly across and the medium-to-heavy clutch is smooth.

The floor-hinged pedals are ideally placed for heel-and-toe work. Power assistance robs the rack-and-pinion steering set-up of some

sensitivity, but it is still a pleasure to point this neutral-handling Aston with that big, 16in wood-rimmed steering wheel. The DB6 is at its best on open, sweeping bends but a little ponderous in slower curves, where there is less opportunity to kill the understeer. As with the Ferrari and Maserati the ride is firm, but Aston offered Armstrong Selectaride dampers and, as speeds rise, the DB6 soaks up irregularities with unexpected aplomb.

Which would I have? The Aston Martin is the most complete and rounded of these three GTs, the one you can imagine using. It is fast, beautifully made and should be reliable. The Maserati is intriguing simply because it is rare and wears its severe styling like a crisply tailored suit. There is a very attractive subtlety about the car, and it might have been my choice were it not for the Ferrari and its engine. You feel almost ashamed to be taken in by such a cliché, but there is a magic about the V12 that overwhelms the other cars. The combination of torque, smoothness and power keeps on coming and is difficult to forget even now. I want one, but not in red.



ASTON MARTIN DB6

Sold/number built 1965-'70/1567

Construction steel platform chassis with Superleggera-type aluminium body

Engine all-alloy, dohc 3995cc straight-six, three SU HD8 or Weber 45DCOE/9 carbs

Max power 282-325bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 280-290lb ft @ 4500rpm

Transmission five-speed ZF manual or three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
rear live axle, parallel trailing arms, Watt linkage, Armstrong Selectaride lever-arm dampers; coil springs f/r

Steering rack and pinion (optional assistance from 1966, standard from '69)

Brakes Girling discs, with servo

Length 15ft 2in (4620mm) **Width** 5ft 6in (1680mm) **Height** 4ft 5½in (1360mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 5¾in (2580mm)

Weight 3250lb (1476kg)

0-60mph 6.1 secs

Top speed 148mph (Vantage) **Mpg** 12½

Price new £4998 (1966)

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MEXICO WAY

The most understated Maserati is also the grand-touring indulgence of a lifetime, Dunhill driving gloves and all. But where did the name come from?

WORDS **JAMES ELLIOTT** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



What many people sometimes forget about Maserati road cars – from the A6 series to the Kyalami and beyond – is just how few of them were produced. Of course, most can bandy about the magic 34 for the 5000GTs. “Rarer than a GTO, you know,” they will say. Yeah, we know, but then so is a Superfast and that simply distorts the reality yet more because, in comparison, the others look positively mass-produced. But they most definitely weren’t: Kyalami, just 150 made; Quattroporte I and II – 759; Bora – 571; and Mistral – 948. And that’s the bizarre thing: loads of kit-car makers or 1950s British Specials merchants turned out similar numbers, yet, while they are consigned to footnotes and books about ‘low production’ and ‘weirdies’, Modena’s exotica is rarely unrecognised and usually deified.

The Mexico is a fine example. Virtually all enthusiasts know of the Mexico: most can spot one at a distance and tell you all about the 4.7-litre (later 4.2) engine and ZF five-speed ‘box bedded in a 3½in-shorter Quattroporte chassis. They might add that you could count right-hookers on your fingers even after a bandsaw accident, that it was built at Vignale, or that it is formally a Tipo AM112 (engine T107). A few might mention the one-off 4.9-litre prototype or a few distinctive Frua cars – one a 3.7-litre ‘six’ that forms the missing link between Mistral and AC 428. And, while many will share an apocryphal tale of the Mexico they were offered for £3k a few years back, not so many will tell you that fewer than



Michelotti's masterful shape is subtly elegant, with trademark quad headlights, airy cabin and thrusting, shark-like nose. Below: the mark of Vignale

500 existed. That's the revised figure: sources originally quoted a paltry 250, which would be boutique exotica on a par with the De Tomaso Deauville or Monteverdi 375.

It isn't that the cars were hard to get hold of when new, although at £7216 – £2k pricier than a Mercedes-Benz 300SEL and dwarfing the XJ6's £1797 – it took Marianas Trench-depth pockets and Enron-esque financial acumen to justify one. Or even that Italy's perpetual underdog was that overawed by its Maranello neighbour's churn. So why do these cars punch quite so far above their weight in public perception and recognition?

Born to fill Maserati's mid-'60s crevasse between the Quattroporte and Ghibli, the two-door, four-seater V8 notchback should have fared well after its 1965 Turin launch. Mystery still surrounds the origin of the name, but you can rule out the oft-quoted John Surtees Mexican Grand Prix victory, which actually post-dated the car. More likely is that it was simply the destination of the Vignale prototype – a Mexican owner used it to resell his trashed 5000GT – and the name stuck.

No prizes for guessing that the styling was by Giovanni Michelotti. It is the epitome of the Italian master's take on Giugiaro's glasshouse effect that informed the former's efforts throughout the 1960s. Quad headlights, big, airy cabin, thin pillars and panoramic views, plus a squared-off boot, are typical traits – as is the shark-like bonnet peak and the fact that the car looks and feels much bigger than it actually is. Even the Borrani wires are framed by the squared off rear arches.

Those who dismiss the Mexico as bland are missing the point, because this is a textbook exercise in classy, understated perfection.

There isn't an ounce of fat on this car: the profile is sleek and the whole is outrageously stylish for a genuine four-seater – less practical than the Quattroporte, but less showy than a Ghibli. It is only the high tail-lights and the plentiful space around them that give the impression of a taller, bulkier car because, when you take in the shape from all angles, it's the image of the perfect predator. Lots of cars get compared to sharks, yet in silver and with its front air intake and tapering bonnet line, this is the most authentic I have been in. Not a cartoon vision of a shark, but a real one.

Touches of beauty and unspoken menace betray its ability, such as the chrome fillet on the leading edge of the bonnet, overhanging the 'face' like a frown on a supermodel. But for the most part its brutality is noticed only when it pours through the twin exhausts.

Inside, the story is the same: the GT idiom in pared-back elegance. And this car, fresh out of a labour-of-love, nut-and-bolt restoration that – even with Mexico prices rocketing – will never recoup the outlay, is the perfect place to experience it. Big Veglia dials – including a 200mph speedo and a redline stretching from 5500rpm to a heady 8000 – dominate in front of the driver, with a rash of knobs and switches stretching across the dash. The passenger is permitted to know the time, but not to worry about such trite details as speed. The single, wafer-thin column stalk is as unobtrusive as the footwell-mounted handbrake or the gorgeous three-spoke, wood-rimmed wheel that never encroaches on the driver's sight-line.

The front seats are huge and sumptuous, yet hard like a dining chair, the upright, knees-tucked-up driving position urging you just to caress the bottom edge of the wheel with your



MASERATI MEXICO

Sold/number built 1966-'73/482

Construction steel chassis and body

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4719cc 90° V8 (4136cc optional from '69), four twin-choke Weber 38DCNL5 carburettors

Max power 290/260bhp @ 5000rpm

Max torque 310lb ft @ 3800rpm/
268lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission five-speed ZF manual or optional three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, Panhard rod; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 15ft 7½in (4760mm)

Width 5ft 8in (1730mm)

Height 4ft 5in (1350mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 8in (2640mm)

Weight 3640lb (1450kg)

0-60mph 7.7 secs

Top speed 159mph **Mpg** 17

Price new £7216

fingertips, elbows resting in your lap and very much more *casuale* than *ape*. The rear seats are surprisingly cossetting and comfortable, with decent legroom, the windows beside them opening only on latches, the rear demister in distinctive vertical lines. And everywhere in this vast, unnaturally roomy cabin there are tridents, even on the air-vent shrouds, while Maserati's name strikes across the glovebox in bold chrome script.

It's all very well admiring the Mexico's visceral and aesthetic beauty, but it barely compares to that under the bonnet. The genius Giulio Alfieri turned Maserati's racing heritage into a roadable V8, and the developed chain-driven, quad-cam 450S unit is the heart and soul of this car. Dance on the hanging pedals – the throttle is an intricate Heath-Robinson arrangement that gives instantaneous, almost sports-car-like response – and the relentless surge and booming noise compete fiercely for your affections. It is a supremely tractable engine, pulling easily up a steep hill in fourth from just a couple of thousand revs and equally adept at mooching gently off the line or shredding its way to shattering the UK speed limit before you have changed up to third.

Dip the surprisingly light clutch and the ZF 'box, with its all-important cruising gear, is recalcitrant when cold, but once warm it's a pleasure to snick through the ratios using the huge wooden knob, listening to the voracious Webers as pace gathers with astonishing alacrity. Wind noise is greater than it should be, but otherwise it is effortlessly refined, offering humming, unstressed – and rapid – progress. Expensive progress, too, with twin 11-gallon tanks drip-feeding the thirsty carbs.

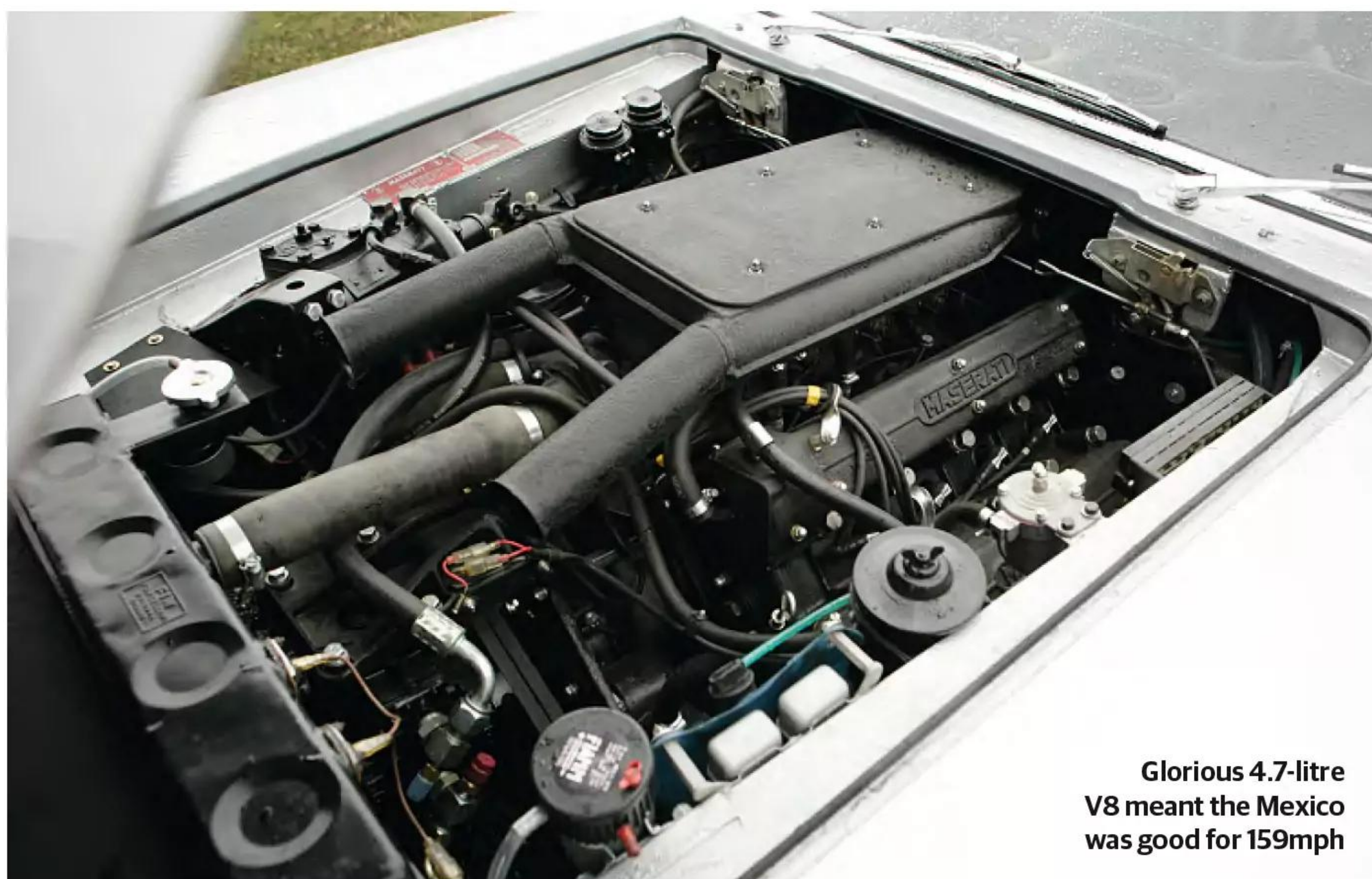
Then you hit some corners and the Mexico loses it sheen. It's significantly more nimble than its looks suggest, yet its woeful turning circle, dramatic understeer and over-light power steering – all unnoticed or a boon when cruising – start to unsettle the car. You get no feedback through the wheel as you throw it into tight corners, and on dicey country roads it can be challenging to say the least. Those effective disc brakes can scrub off all the speed they want, but approaching a wet S-bend at speed is

terrifying. It feels as if the front tyres are washing out on corners, plus it's all too easy to upset the balance of the car: the weight distribution feels as if it is pulling in all directions at once when you really try to hustle it. The rear suspension lurches, that Salisbury live axle struggling to retain solid contact with the road and even power distribution.

Notch it up another gear and lay aside the fear factor, and you can drive through this: foolhardiness is rewarded by a tautening of the Mexico's reflexes as that steering gains some feel, and the nose and tail start to obey directional input, even if they are unruly in doing so and have to be controlled on the throttle. All that time the engine is screaming like a Rottweiler being throttled, and you wonder why you would ever want to drive that aggressively on the road. You simply shouldn't have to wring it so hard to get the sensations that this otherwise ideal car should offer at less suicidal speeds. But then you also consider whether that is really a shortcoming at all: that the car is not so good at doing something it was never designed to do. If it was built for Italian getaway drivers, it would have had rear doors.

No, the Mexico was built for the *autostrada*, *autobahn* and *autoroute*. If you were doing a transcontinental dash in a relatively straight line in the 1960s, it is hard to imagine a more rewarding, comfortable or feel-good way of doing it. The car rides bumps and potholes with aplomb, such low, sleek lines belying a healthy ground clearance. Only your fingertips would be exercised in marshalling the vague steering, and they wouldn't even break into a sweat. The Mexico's only failing as a GT is that there is nowhere to rest your left foot, so it is usually left dangling uncomfortably over the clutch pedal. Yet you do get the bonuses of incessant admiring glances from the *cognescenti* and the knowledge that your car lives up to the promise of those Dunhill driving gloves that your partner bought you. In a car such as this, it just feels right – compulsory, even – to wear them. Boutique exotica indeed.

Thanks to Classic Motor Cars of Bridgnorth
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Glorious 4.7-litre V8 meant the Mexico was good for 159mph



From top: super-stylish cabin, with row of toggles across the dashboard; gorgeous timber accents; neatly resolved exterior doorhandles; Borrani wires sport 225/70s instead of 205x15s

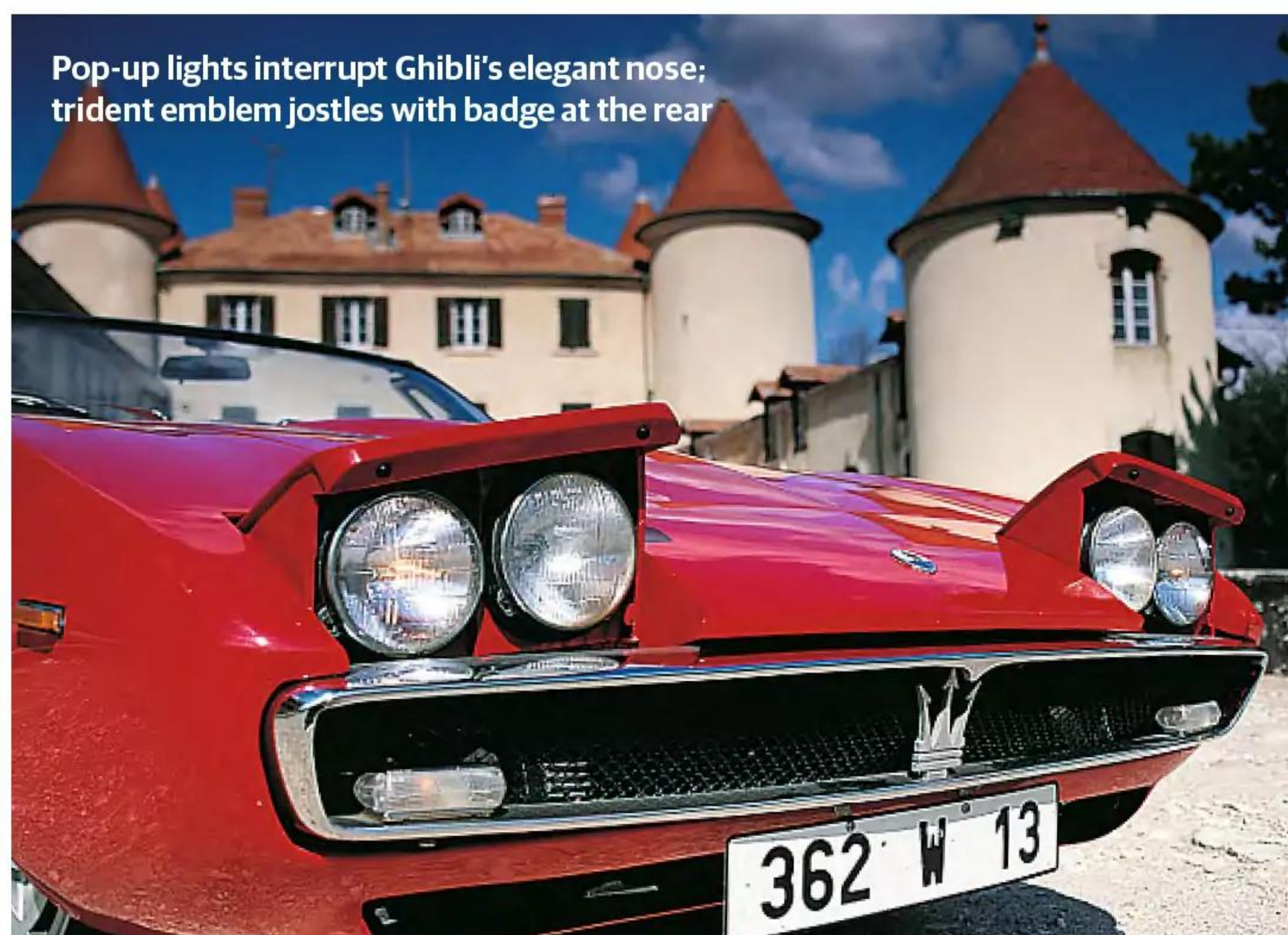




Dream academy

You love classics and your lottery win is burning a hole in your pocket, so what do you do? Buy a château with its own race circuit, and a Ghibli to go with it

WORDS **JAMES ELLIOTT** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



Pop-up lights interrupt Ghibli's elegant nose; trident emblem jostles with badge at the rear



Wednesday 30 March, Teddington, Middx. Spring not so much threatened to break through as peeked nervously over the back of the sofa before dissolving in a puddle of disappointment. Now rain lashes against the windows of C&SC's beige, suburban Lubyanka Building, the temperature plummets as if the Gulf Stream has stopped, er, streaming and the pumping air-con neatly recirculates cold germs to anyone not already suffering. It's time to escape to another world.

A quick visit to the dry cleaners to pick up the obligatory linen suit – the national uniform at my intended destination – and then a quickfire two-hour flight from Gatwick to Marseille. Marseille: hidden jewel of the south of France, in the shadow of the imposing basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde, a chic, upmarket, sophisticated cultural melting pot, not just the oft-bleak racetrack for upstart pizza delivery boys as depicted in Luc Besson's *Taxi* movies. The mixture of Mediterranean cultures comes together in Pierre Puget's *Vieille Charité*. Built in the 17th century for the homeless, it now holds exhibitions celebrating African, Oceanic and Amerindian arts and archaeology. Then there is that magnificent island fortress, the 16th-century Château d'If, made famous by Alexander Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and, of course, the historic docks which have thrived since time immemorial and boomed in the 19th century, making Marseille one of the wealthiest cities on the Mediterranean.

Arrival time: 10pm. It's 18°C with clear night skies. There is no time to linger in the city, though: it will be roof-down tonight. A flying visit to classic collector and top-end dealer Jean Guikas to pick up my wheels: an immaculate red Ghibli Spyder he stores for me. Guikas rates the car very highly: "If you look at the prices for what I consider three pretty similar cars – the Aston Martin DB5, Ferrari Daytona Spider and Maserati Ghibli Spyder – the differential is crazy. The Maserati is just as good a car and, I think, the best-looking convertible since 1960. I've owned 549 Ferraris – 55 of them Daytonas,

including a lot of Spyders. For all purposes, the Ghibli is the better car: it does not come with any of the hassles of the Ferrari, the engine is more reliable and it is much more usable. As an owner and a dealer in collector cars, I can't believe they are still so underappreciated."

What's so impressive about this car is its ability to be coaxed along with barely a tickle of throttle, to ease through city traffic at 1500-2000rpm before throwing off the shackles of the city and taking the country route up to Aix-en-Provence, a dual-personality town of quaint French perfection hemmed in by tower blocks and a cat's cradle of *autoroutes*.

After detouring into the pretty town centre of Aix (pronounced simply 'X'), I take the D10 and head east into the mountains. Through St Marc-Jaumegarde and Vauvenargues, then a sharp left on to a less well-travelled road that meanders up the mountain through olive groves before plunging down the other side to sanctuary. In this case Le Grand Sambuc, my château set in its own valley and 600 hectares of land. From anywhere on the property you can see its boundaries – just look skywards and the tops of the mountains are what count for fenceposts here. It is the sort of holiday retreat that everyone should have.

On arrival, it is good to note that the shutters have been thrown open on the *bastide* and fresh air has been gushing into the den that occupies the entire top floor, decorated with motoring mementoes and a few favourite books. An hour or two of relaxation before retiring to bed in the grandest of its many bedrooms.

Thursday 31 March, Le Grand Sambuc, south of France. Is there anything better than to be woken by the sun gently warming your eyelids as its morning light streams through the window? And the still silence of daybreak. The nearest neighbour is 10km away so they cannot be heard, just as they cannot hear me – the significance of which will become apparent. As is traditional, a quick tour of the estate is called for before the day begins in earnest. With the hood stowed under its cover, the Ghibli fires instantly and settles into that inoffensive burble. This Spyder is a manual (50 or so of the 125 were automatics), but it is no more difficult to drive. The five-speed gearbox

KING OF THE CASTLE RÉGIS FRAISSINET

This French former racing driver – "I raced for fun, not as a profession," says Régis, but some serious steeds have included a Porsche RSK, Ferraris, Jaguars and Lotus 23 – bought Le Grand Sambuc in 1975 and built the track for himself a decade later. He is now based in Geneva and selling the château because, in his own words: "I'm 73 and would like to retire now."

M Fraissinet's pride and joy is his huge collection of model cars, from the most mundane to the most exotic Land Speed Record cars, and in all scales. It would have been much bigger, he says, but his parents



confiscated most of them: "I started when I was five, and at 12 they told me it was not right for a child to have so many toy cars. When I told them I didn't play with them but was collecting them, they were taken from me." His passion spills out of his den in the *bastide* into the château, where the frieze in one dining room bears repeated images of a vintage car as if it were driving around the room. Another dining room (there are several here) is dominated by automobilia and photos of M Fraissinet chatting with luminaries such as Michael Schumacher and Mika Häkkinen.

Many exotic cars have passed through Régis' hands, but today the only classic occupying the garaging is an aged V8 Aston Martin that trundles around reliably and fulfills all his local driving needs. Such is the space in the château that 150 people have sat down to dinner at once, and recent guests have included Eric Comas. It will inevitably be hard to let it go.



Clockwise: at 1900m, the Grand Sambuc's private track dips and plunges; busy dash, with speed running up to 200mph; this is the life, if you happen to have €9m

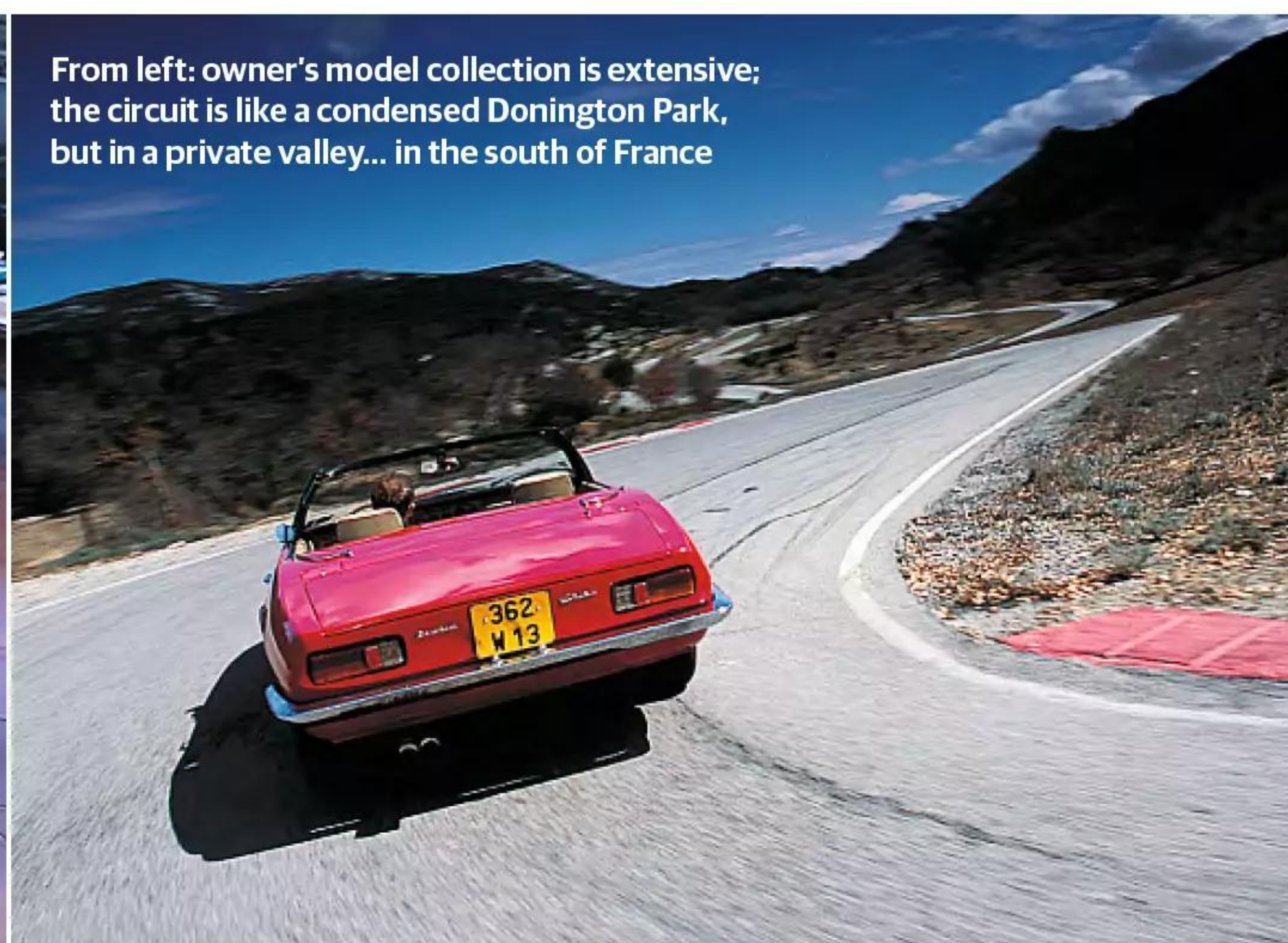


*'Head east into the mountains,
meandering up through olive groves
before plunging down to sanctuary'*



Clockwise from main: enjoying Grand Sambuc's private race track - every home should have one; Giugiaro-styled Ghibli good for sub-7 secs 0-60mph; four Webers feed 4719cc V8; estate covers 600 hectares of mountainous idyll





From left: owner's model collection is extensive; the circuit is like a condensed Donington Park, but in a private valley... in the south of France

has a longish throw but feels assured and easy, and the wand settles into each berth with a satisfying click. Its strength and tractability are ideal for the jaded, sometimes potholed surfaces on the private roads of the estate.

Passing the tennis court on my right, I burble over the brow to receive a jolt of excitement as I see my pride and joy: my private race track. At 1900m long, it is a tight circuit but in nature a mini-Donington Park, pitching and diving over the brutal natural landscape. The start/finish is on a downhill straight leading to a wide, Redgate-esque hairpin, which then eases you uphill for a 150m spurt before a downhill 90° dive left then right. After another short straight, a wider left-right combination bottoms out by the right – a bit like the Craner Curves flowing into the Old Hairpin – before a kink left then uphill to two tight rights at the highest point on the track – McLean's and Coppice condensed down into 50m – before another left and the long downward start/finish straight once again.

Surely not the right place to exploit an adroit *boulevardier* such as the Ghibli, so cosmopolitan and comfortable trickling along the coast at posing pace? But the truth is, you could learn to drive in this car or you could learn your racing lines in it. The Giorgetto Giugiaro-styled missile was launched as a hardtop in 1966 and lasted for the bulk of Citroën's stewardship of the Modena marque. Developed from a prototype unveiled on the Ghia stand at the 1964 Turin Salon, it is powered by a V8 closely related to the one that powered the 450S a decade earlier, the dry sump of which allows a sleek line and road-hugging ride height that virtually eliminate body roll.

The styling and fearsome price may have been bang up to date in the late '60s, but the technology, although proven, was hardly groundbreaking, and the engine needed to work hard to propel its heft to some impressive speeds, including a sub-7 secs 0-60mph and a top end well over 150mph. But buyers weren't bothered by that because it was packed with modern trinkets such as air conditioning, electric windows, power steering and discs all round (vented on later cars). In 1970 the SS model added another 200cc and 5bhp through increased stroke, to better evoke the hot Libyan wind after which the model took its name.

You sit low in the spacious cockpit on thick, cossetting seats, staring at the ugly 1970s dials – the boastful speedo reads up to 200mph – which jar with the traces of classic chrome, the wide mass of horizontally mounted toggle switches and extravagant quarterlight winders. Apart from those irritating Veglia dials and the Poundstretcher-like dashboard covering, it's the very epitome of civilised, the high point of sleek, long-bonnet, shark-nose styling.

Yet on the track it has a split personality. Pump the organ-style accelerator mounted on a rod that springs horizontally out of the transmission tunnel, revs rise to the 5500rpm redline, the bass churn becomes a higher-pitched, urgent thrum after 3500rpm, and the Ghibli ditches any propensity to wallow and becomes complicit in your desires and actions. A hint of understeer turns to a controllable tailslide on the hairpin, the perfect weight distribution keeping it honest through the tighter turns, superb brakes allowing real race speeds, fingertip-light power steering giving great feedback through the wood-rimmed wheel. And that precise ZF 'box encourages frequent changes just for the sheer joy of it.

With a morning of circuit driving under my belt it's back to the château for lunch. One day, when the next payrise comes through, I will put some serious money into the estate. The track is booked 150 days a year for everything from track day cars to unique historic racers: there's no sound limit, no neighbours to disturb. Yet there is so much potential for someone with a bit of vision. So many buildings are begging to be converted into rooms so fellow enthusiasts can share my good fortune, spending their holiday on the track while those less interested browse the delights of Marseille. One day...

My phone chirrups and I wake with a start, face down at my desk, nose buried in a spread of the magazine: to the left a Ghibli, to the right an advert for 'my' château – for a mere €9m. As reality creeps back and the dream subsides, I curse myself for not coming up with a perfect partner with whom to share all that perfection. To sleep, perchance to dream.

Thanks to Emile Garcin (emilegarcin.com),
Jean Guikas at GTC (gtc-collection-cars.com)

MASERATI GIBLI SPYDER

Sold/number built 1968-'72/125 (total Ghibli production 1274 cars from 1967-'73)

Construction welded tubular steel chassis, steel body

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4719cc 90° V8, four twin-choke Weber 40DCNL/5 carburettors

Max power 330bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 290lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission five-speed ZF manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by unequal-length wishbones, coil springs **rear** Salisbury live axle with semi-elliptic leaf springs, Panhard rods; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering powered-assisted worm and sector

Brakes Girling discs, with servo

Length 15ft 5in (4699mm)

Width 5ft 10½in (1791mm)

Height 3ft 9½in (1156mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 4in (2540mm)

Weight 3500lb (1588kg)

0-60mph 6.6 secs

Top speed 168mph **Mpg** 14

Price new \$10,180



GIORGIO'S

The outrageous Maserati Boomerang was Giugiaro's calling card for ItalDesign, and the 'ultimate sports car' was unearthed outside a Spanish nightspot

WORDS **MICK WALSH**
PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES MANN**

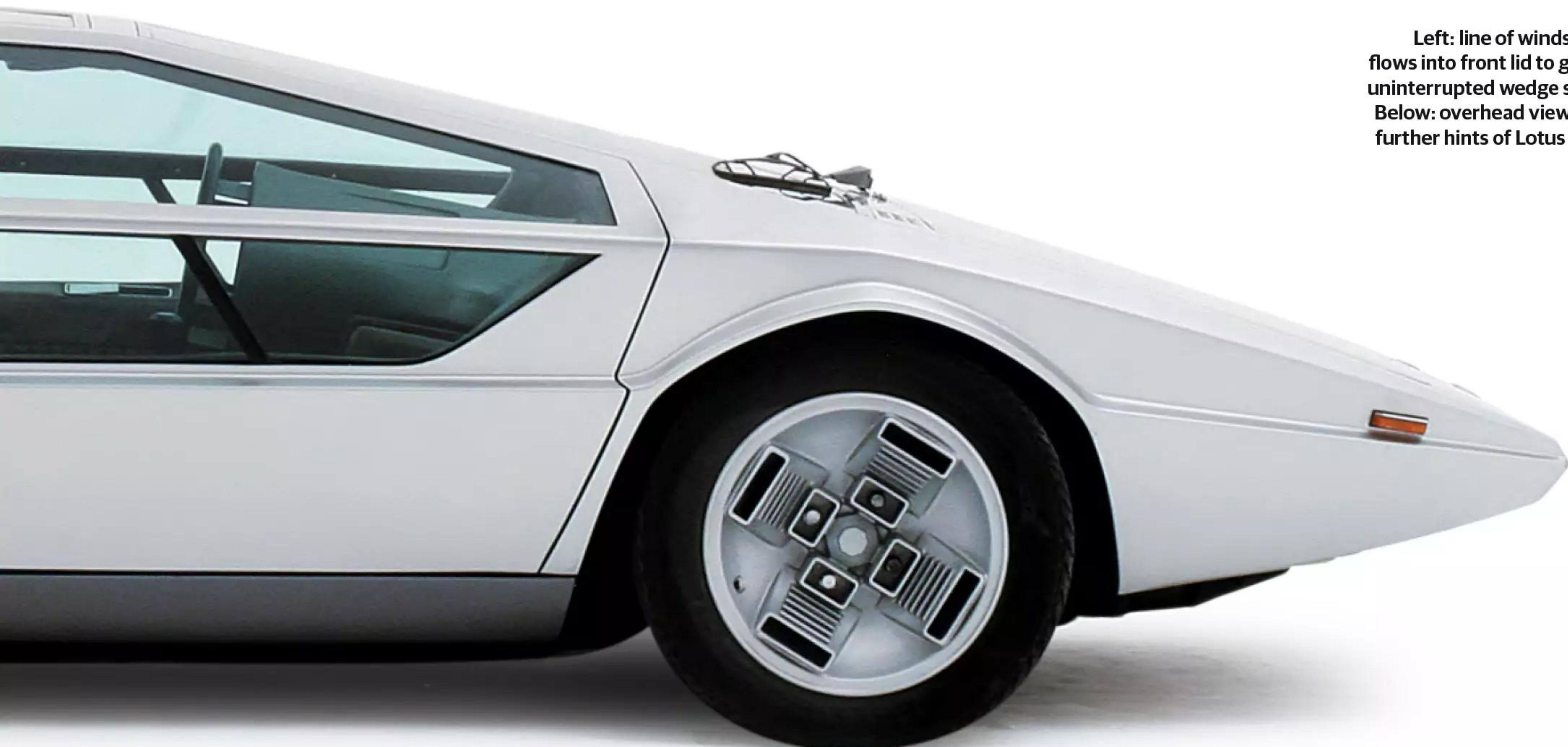
If art-gallery directors had any vision, they would be celebrating the wedge design school of the late '60s and early '70s. This golden era of dream cars produced some of the wildest fantasies ever to grace a motor-show floor. Just imagine the display – Pininfarina's Ferrari 512S, Bertone's Lamborghini Bravo Stratos Prototipo Zero and Alfa Carabo, and Gandini's original Countach taking centre stage. Another concept car that would be essential for this spectacular fantasy group is the fantastic Maserati Boomerang.

Designed at ItalDesign under the direction of the Cubist king of styling Giorgetto Giugiaro, it's hard to imagine that the same drawing office that gave us such practical icons as the Volkswagen Golf and the Fiat Panda could also produce this sleek, wedge-shaped fantasy based on the Maserati Bora. But ItalDesign has an impressive portfolio of extreme machines that kicked off with the Bizzarrini Manta, produced when Giugiaro and Aldo Mantovani linked up to form the company in 1968.

Even standing still, the Boomerang looks as if it's flashing by at 160mph thanks to the arrow

motif that echoes along its shape and in its boldly angled shutlines. Standing just 107cm tall, the Boomerang's long, front-hinged doors feature low, Lamborghini Marzal-style side windows that add to the greenhouse cabin with its huge, flat glass and long Perspex sections. All the windows in the original concept were fixed but later, when the car was rebuilt into a working prototype, Ital's engineers fitted electric windows. Yet without air-con it must have cooked its attention-seeking crew.

The Boomerang made its debut on the ItalDesign stand at the Turin Salon, where Giugiaro described it as "the ultimate sports car". In detail this radical, conceptual non-runner was quite different from today. Not only was the paint scheme orange with light-toned graphics, but the interior design was even more futuristic. The instrument cluster set inside the steering wheel was designed "with visibility and safety in case of a frontal impact" claimed Giugiaro. Quite how that dustbin-sized module protected you on impact in the pre-airbag age is a mystery, but it looked amazing with the steering-wheel spokes disappearing inside the outer edge. Unlike the conventional Veglia



Left: line of windscreen flows into front lid to give an uninterrupted wedge shape. Below: overhead view gives further hints of Lotus Esprit

MARAUDER



round gauges and rocker switches now fitted, the circular display was dominated by a rev counter, the huge needle arcing around the top half with ancillary instruments inset below.

Unlike many car specialists, Giugiaro had a broader agenda in product design and his young company had branched out into Nikon cameras, Seiko watches and the interiors of Augusta helicopters as well as automotive contracts. That vision rubbed off on his car designs, particularly the showcase interiors of early '70s dream cars such as the Alfasud Caimano, Porsche Tapiro and the Boomerang. "What is important about concept cars," said Giugiaro, "is that from a creativity point of view you reach worlds, find different problems, should find different solutions and so increase

your background as a designer." One glance at the Boomerang and you can see echoes of the Lotus Esprit in its angular profile, and no doubt Colin Chapman was well aware of the Maserati's existence.

Although the basis of the Boomerang was a stock Maserati Bora chassis – some reports claimed it had a racing-spec engine, but this is nonsense – it required major work to turn the static display car into a fully driveable prototype. Repainted a brighter metallic silver with grey-blue graphics, including a huge trident motif and ItalDesign logo on the nose, the Boomerang returned to the motor-show circuit, appearing at Geneva, Paris, London and Barcelona until 1974 when it was sold to a Spanish enthusiast and vanished.



Clockwise from above: Citroën SM-style hammock leather seats are comfortable, but steering binnacle is intrusive for pedals; Giugiaro Bagatelle autograph; modest badge; drum-like console with later Veglia dials





Clockwise from below: strip tail-lights; bizarre wheels with dummy vents; ashtray hides fuel-pump switch on centre console; unadorned shape – original concept had huge trident on nose



'Driving through Benidorm late one evening, Ollman saw this sensational machine flash by. He gave chase but lost the silver vision, and spent the rest of the night looking for it'

Six years later, German businessman Bertold Ollman found the Boomerang while visiting his properties in Spain in the early '80s. Driving through Benidorm late one evening, Ollman saw this sensational machine flash by while sitting at traffic lights. He gave chase but lost the silver vision, and spent the rest of the night driving around in the hope of seeing it again. Then, by chance, he spotted it parked outside a nightclub. Already a Maserati enthusiast and Ghibli owner, Ollman recognised the show car. Although the Boomerang was mildly customised and adorned with extra coloured lights, Ollman was determined to save it. After a drawn-out rebuild, the one-off was again road legal after passing the German TÜV test.

Finally, in 1990, the Ital-built wonder made its post-restoration debut at the Louis Vuitton

Classic in Paris, where Giugiaro was judging and happily autographed its steel bodywork. The Boomerang was Ollman's ticket to all the major events, culminating in a trip to Pebble Beach. After 12 years of ownership, Ollman consigned it to Christie's, which auctioned it at Rétromobile where it made £440,268. It went to a private collection in the Middle East, but not before British specialist Paul Grist had sorted the running gear and fitted mirrors. In Dubai, where even Enzos are commonplace, the silver wedge must have upstaged every exotic. In 2005 it returned to Paris for Christie's to auction again at Rétromobile. If only design museums had the budget of fine-art galleries. It's time this wild piece was hanging on a wall. 

Thanks to Mark Donaldson at Christie's (christies.com)



FAMILY FORTUNES

Vastly costly new, the four-seater Lamborghini Espada, Ferrari 400GT, Maserati Indy and Iso Lele now lie at the affordable end of the GT spectrum

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **ROMAN RÄTZKE**



In the fashionable and flighty world of the Italian supercar – a genre that, by its very nature, was always about boutique baubles rather than life's necessities – the big four-seaters of the late 1960s and early 1970s were promoted as the new working members of their respective families.

Yet they were also the flagships, often costing many thousands of pounds more, in period, than their two-seater siblings that, today, extract seven-figure sums from collectors and make purists dribble.

If you were a Latin manufacturer of exotic grand touring automobiles in the late 1960s, the idea of offering a full four-seater in your line-up was already becoming an inevitability rather than just an interesting option. This was driven in part by the local styling houses (then in perhaps their most creative phase) and certainly by rising buyer demand for a more versatile product in a marketplace that was busier than ever with wannabe exotica and hybrid hopefuls, but which had a fairly static number of potential customers.

Then, moving into the more hard-bitten '70s, with its various fuel shortages and general po-faced attitudes to the pleasures of the super-rich, having a four-seater option became a necessity if you wanted to sell very fast, very expensive cars in any meaningful numbers. Somehow, the possibility of two additional spaces – with the useful bonus of a decent-sized boot – at a stroke defused buyers' anxieties without trashing the supercar fantasy. The rise of the four-place super-GT also gave new scope for previously near-heretical options such as power-assisted steering, air conditioning and automatic transmission, all designed to further tame the excesses of these heavyweights for supposed everyday civilian use.

So while the image-making front- and mid-engined 'recreational' two-seaters still grabbed all the headlines and tempted buyers into the dealerships, the four-seater models equalled more customers, more volume and, hopefully, more profit.

Even if these cars' typical customers of the time might never take their partners – or their offspring – in that family-friendly Ferrari or Maserati, the point was that they could if they wanted to. In that way spouses were placated, and boards of directors' concerns that their chairperson was about to have a very expensive, Ferrari-shaped mid-life crisis were reassured. Somehow, a supercar with four seats seemed marginally more socially and domestically responsible than one with two.

It is hard to say, of course, how many Ferrari 400GT or Lamborghini Espada drivers of the 1960s and '70s really took their cars to the supermarket; or if former Ghibli and Grifo customers were to be seen lining up to trade them in against an Indy or a Lele, just so they could take granny to church or the children to school. To be honest, the notion that individuals with £8000 or more to spend on a motor car in the early '70s actually needed a dual-purpose, handbuilt Italian model was



a nonsense: 'need' doesn't come into it with these vehicles. Such people usually had staff (and a second car) for life's chores, and if they truly wanted to be practical they could buy themselves one of the latest 3-litre BMWs, a V8 Mercedes or, best of all, a V12 Jaguar. That would do the job better for a lot less cash – as if value for money was ever a consideration at this level of the market.

What is certain is that four-seater supercars such as these did good business by the rarefied standards of the exotic-car trade, then still in its infancy. I'm not sure that Lamborghini has ever produced a more successful front-engined V12 model than the Espada (with 1227 built from 1968-'78), while the Indy (1136 examples

'Only when squeezing the throttle hard for a lunge of acceleration does the Chevy V8 raise its voice above a distant rumble'

from 1966-'74) is easily one of the most prolific of the 'classic-era' V8-powered Maseratis.

Likewise the Ferrari. Launched in 1972 as the 365GT4, it became the 4.8-litre 400GT (and 400 automatic) in 1976, and then the Bosch fuel-injected 400i in 1979. The full 5-litre 412GT ran from 1986 to 1989, giving a final tally of 2911 cars with this body style.

The Iso Lele, however, is a different story. The marque was not yet 10 years old when the Bertone-styled Lele was introduced in 1969. Just five years and 317 cars later, though, the Lele was gone – as was Iso itself.

The company had caused a sensation with its beautiful Grifo; less so the Lele, which was really just a reboot of the four-seater concept that had launched the marque, in 1962, with the Rivolta. The slim-pillared elegance of

that earlier car was replaced by an angular Brutalism in the Lele, with its heavy tail and C-pillar plus the sullen, sleepy look of its half-hidden quad headlights.

Iso's formula of luxury fittings and a refined drivetrain in a rigid, Bizzarini-designed chassis had wowed press and buyers alike in 1962. But by the early '70s, those with £10k to spend were less forgiving of the Lele's poor ventilation, 11mpg thirst and cumbersome steering lock: you could, after all, buy all of the same shortcomings in a faster Aston Martin or a much cheaper Jensen.

Iso of Milan was near-unique among Italian exotic marques in using a non-homegrown engine, yet, in a way, the Chevrolet V8 (later examples used Ford units) is the best part of a car that seems to have all the right ingredients but fails to come together as a credible entity.

From the off this 1971 Lele's over-styled dashboard and ugly seats do not endear the car to me, and the dramatic sweep of the roofline compromises the headroom in the otherwise commodious rear seats. Maybe the five-speed Sport version would get the Lele over the line as a car to engage the driver. As an automatic, such as here, it is at least fast and quiet: only when squeezing the throttle hard for a lunge of acceleration does it raise its voice above a distant rumble. Its general smoothness and refinement complement the low levels of wind noise, the slick-shifting gearbox (which gives 90mph in second and a bit over 130mph in top) and the pleasantly firm ride, which takes bumpy corners in its stride. Certainly the Lele, with its de Dion tube rear suspension, is stable, swooping through long curves fluidly and capably. Yet it feels harder work than it should do in a series of tighter turns: slower, with too much roll and wheel-twirling.

The Maserati Indy is, to me, better looking than the Iso, but it lacks the drama of the Espada and the formal elegance of the 400GT. Built to supplement the four-door Quattroporte (with which it shares much of its chassis structure and drivetrain), it has roughly equal legroom in the rear to the Ferrari and Iso. But it can't match the brilliantly packaged Lamborghini, which is shorter and much lower than either yet noticeably roomier in all directions inside. The hatchback treatment of the Indy's Vignale-styled body cannot be a bad thing, although, like the Espada, this arrangement does tend to leave all your goods and chattels exposed in the boot.

There's a hint of the over-styling suffered by the Lele inside, but its wide, shallow dashboard, with the five minor gauges on a level with the big speedo and rev counter, is more handsome and (slightly) more logical than the Iso's confusion of switchgear and far-flung minor instruments.

The 1970 Maserati's V8 (4.2 litres in this case, but a 4.7 was available) is an oddity in the world of Italian power units in that it has all the complication of quad camshafts and twin-choke Weber carburettors, yet gives the driver a modest rev limit to play with. In theory you can use 6500rpm, but 5500rpm tends to feel like



Clockwise from left:
Iso's spacious rear; fussy
interior design; 260bhp
Chevrolet unit was later
replaced by more potent
Ford V8; huge bumper
wraps under rear wings





Below, clockwise: Indy interior is most coherent here; frontal styling is a touch bland beside the dramatic Ghibli; howling quad-cam V8; individually sculpted rear chairs



'The Indy winds itself up quickly and unfussily to the high cruising speeds that feel like its natural habitat'





Clockwise from above:
restrained cabin is lifted
by funky two-tone hide;
high roofline gives plenty
of headroom; a sight to
strike fear into all but the
bravest home mechanics



enough. The good news is that the V8 is velvety and superbly flexible at all revs, from its steady idle to well over 100mph in third, or with a solid and exciting surge of mid-range torque as you accelerate through the five well-spaced and smoothly operating ZF-supplied gears.

Higher-g geared than the Iso, but not so fierce in pick-up as the V12-engined Lamborghini and Ferrari, the Indy winds itself up quickly and unfussily to the high cruising speeds that feel like its natural habitat, their sustainability limited only by the size of its fuel tanks as it swills petrol at a rate of 13mpg.

Total stability, strong brakes and good sealing against wind noise make the cultivated Indy relaxing, and its weight and size are soon forgotten. On the move it tends to belie the simplicity of its live rear axle and semi-elliptic leaf springs, only hinting – at lower speeds, on bumpy roads – at the limited wheel travel and unsprung weight implications in its firm ride. I assume that well-padded seating and deep sidewalls on its 70-profile Michelin rubber combine to make the Indy more comfortable than it should be, as well as more wieldy.

The handling is neutral and there is enough feel in the powered steering to make accurate judgements, but it's more predictable than agile. The progression of the throttle, the well-spaced gear ratios and the seamless power delivery make it an instinctive thing to drive quickly but smoothly.

The Espada and 400GT, with their oversquare four-cam V12 engines and bespoke double-wishbone suspension all round, appear to be the most natural adversaries within this four-way comparison. If you can live with their slightly compromised long-arms/short-legs driving positions, then four adults can travel comfortably in each of them all day, urged along behind engines with one Weber choke for each cylinder that will rev out to almost 8000rpm (in the case of the more aggressively tuned Lamborghini) and push these 4000lb grand tourers to more than 150mph.

Both are steel-bodied, but whereas the Espada has a unitary shell, the 400GT retains a classic tubular chassis. At £13-15k, these were among the most expensive cars listed in the UK in the mid-1970s. By my reckoning, only a Countach, a Rolls-Royce Corniche or a Mercedes-Benz 600 cost more – or, to put it another way, for the price of an Espada you could have two Jaguar XJ12s with enough change left over to buy an Alfasud.

To a certain extent, that high cost was reflected in the engineering. Where the Iso and Maserati relied on all kinds of off-the-shelf componentry (much of it from Jaguar, in the case of the Indy), the V12 cars are much more bespoke in character. To maintain the purity of concept of the basic drivetrain, both the Espada and 400GT had, for instance, fabricated aluminium suspension wishbones and in-house transmissions; the Lambo gearbox even had synchromesh on reverse.

There is something of the wild, adventurous spirit of the Miura in the futuristic, waist-high Espada, while the classic, formal proportions



of the Ferrari can be traced back to a line of thought that began with the 250GTE in the early 1960s. The original 365GT4's claim to fame within the confusion of the Maranello line-up is that, if you discount the more compact 365GTC/4, it was the first Ferrari four-seater to use the quad-cam 4.4-litre V12 shared with the Daytona, but with a wet sump and side-rather than downdraught Webers mounted on either side above the exhaust cams, instead of in the vee between the cylinder heads. You can tell the 365 externally from the later 400, 400i and 412 versions of this classic Leonardo Fioravanti-penned shape by its sextet of rear lights and centre-lock wheels; the 400GT sprouted a discreet chin spoiler.

'On the move the Espada feels more uplifting than the Ferrari, in keeping with its dream-car-for-the-road personality'

Entering through long doors, you can see straight away that this 1976 car's muted but richly leathered cabin has been styled to echo the neat simplicity of the external body design. Its handsome seats and padded headlining look inviting, and the dashboard, with its angled, clearly marked minor instruments, is concise by 1970s supercar standards. The chunky column stalks and ski-slope centre console, with its intuitive heating, ventilation and air-con controls around the long, assertive-looking gearlever, appears as well thought-out as the Iso cabin is haphazard.

The angle of the Momo steering wheel, with its sensuous rim and pleasingly weighted response, looks odd; yet it's perfectly placed for weaving this easy-to-see-out-of, XJ6-sized machine through traffic. The V12's flexibility

means you can leave it in third most of the time, then accelerate in one fluid, progressive lunge to beyond 100mph before you start looking for fourth. The heavy but smooth clutch (a feel common to all the manual cars here) seems a reasonable penalty to pay for a gearbox that has long but precise movements, copes easily with the torque demands and is handily positioned to favour the steering wheel. With perfect gear spacing, there is a silky athleticism to the way the 400GT spins up to high cruising speeds. The lusty, sustained push still impresses, but doesn't terrify as you exert fine control over the Webers through a beautifully weighted throttle pedal. The crescendo of sounds from up front means the Ferrari is anything but quiet at high revs – who would want it to be? – but throttle back and it settles into a contented, distant growl.

The ride is so generally excellent that you almost don't notice how comfortable the 400 is, and you could say the same of its mostly neutral handling composure. It simply asks that you remember how many revs you have in hand (always more than you think) and the throttle is your friend when it comes to urging the car through any corner with a good line of sight. It is incisive but not twitchy, tenacious yet not so glued to the road that you feel its limits are only for the truly gifted. It tells you everything that is going on, and you get the idea at once.

By the time Ferrari introduced its 400, the Lamborghini Espada was into its third series, with vented discs, more power and, best of all, power steering to silence critics of its low-speed manners. The dash of this '73 example looks less exotic than earlier types, but is more rational without fully embracing column-stalk operation in the way the Ferrari does.

After a short whirr of the starter, the Espada's V12 hums into life. You sit slightly knees-up, operating closely spaced pedals and a much shorter, snickier gearchange than the Ferrari's long wand, but with a similarly sweet action and a heavy but progressive clutch that allows you to dish out the seamless flow of torque precisely for serene low-speed progress.

On the move it feels a more uplifting place to be than the 400 – in keeping with the Espada's dream-car-for-the-road personality – but in many ways they come to the same dynamic and functional conclusions. It feels bigger and less easy to see out of, if not oppressively so in either case. The in-gear maxima are similar, but the Lambo picks up a fraction more enthusiastically and shuts down more eagerly. There's plenty of torque, yet once the fluids are warm it feels natural to let it rip. Use 7900rpm and you won't be changing into fifth until 130mph, but even deploying 6500rpm you get that delicious sense of endless thrust and a magnificent, multi-layered, chain-threshing, cam-spooling sound that only comes with a carburetted Latin V12.

Controllable within fine limits, the Espada has a touch of initial understeer – mostly disguised by the steering's power assistance – and just enough lean to give a sense of the high cornering forces you are generating as it



Clockwise from below:
shape is an evolution
of the Marzal concept;
wild, Giotto Bizzarrini-
designed V12; reclined
seating; SIII dash is more
rational than earlier car's





FERRARI 400GT

Sold/no built 1976-'79/502

Construction tubular steel chassis, steel body with glassfibre floor, aluminium bonnet and bootlid

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4823cc V12, six twin-choke Weber 38DCOE carburettors

Max power 340bhp @ 6500rpm

Max torque 347lb ft @ 3600rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar f/r; telescopic front dampers, self-levelling rear struts

Steering power-assisted ZF worm and roller

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 15ft 9in (4810mm)

Width 5ft 11in (1803mm)

Height 4ft 4in (1320mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 10½in (2700mm)

Weight 4160lb (1887kg)

0-60mph 6.7 secs

Top speed 153mph **Mpg** 12

Price new £23,999 (1978)

LAMBORGHINI ESPADA

Sold/no built 1968-'78/1227

Construction steel monocoque, with aluminium bonnet

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 3929cc V12, six twin-choke Weber 40DCOE carburettors

Max power 350bhp @ 6500rpm

Max torque 290lb ft @ 5500rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, by wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering ZF worm and sector, optional power assistance

Brakes vented Girling discs, with twin servos

Length 15ft 6½in (4730mm)

Width 6ft 1½in (1867mm)

Height 3ft 11in (1195mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 8½in (2655mm)

Weight 3875lb (1761kg)

0-60mph 6.5 secs

Top speed 158mph **Mpg** 15

Price new £10,945 (1973)

ISO LELE

Sold/no built 1969-'74/317

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-iron, ohv 5736cc V8, four-barrel Carter carburettor

Max power 260bhp @ 4500rpm

Max torque 380lb ft @ 3200rpm

Transmission GM400 three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones **rear** de Dion axle, twin longitudinal arms, Watt linkage; coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 15ft 3in (4650mm)

Width 5ft 9in (1750mm)

Height 4ft 5in (1350mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 10½in (2700mm)

Weight 3704lb (1680kg)

0-60mph 7.3 secs

Top speed 132mph **Mpg** 11.3

Price new £9945

MASERATI INDY 4200

Sold/no built 1966-'74/1136

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4136cc V8, four twin-choke Weber 42DCNF carburettors

Max power 260bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 268lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission five-speed

manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs

rear live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted ZF recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 16ft (4877mm)

Width 5ft 10in (1778mm)

Height 4ft 3in (1295mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 6½in (2600mm)

Weight 3638lb (1650kg)

0-60mph 7.5 secs

Top speed 156mph **Mpg** 14

Price new £9677 (1973)

sweeps through curves, parrying crests and cambers with an agility that belies its bulk. If the steering doesn't have quite the feel of the Ferrari, if its shell doesn't seem quite so of a piece, it doesn't matter. There is a sense of theatre and adventure about this fabulous car that brushes all such thoughts aside.

Cars such as the Espada, the Indy and the 400GT still represent the most affordable route into the golden era of the multi-cylinder, multi-camshaft European supercoupé. An Iso Lele is likely to be even cheaper, but also harder to find: that Iso produced so few highlights the dilemma with this genre of American-engined European exotic. In the end, it lacked both the credibility and the staying power to go the distance in a more hostile '70s environment, whatever the supposed servicing and durability

benefits were of its 5.7-litre American engine, latterly Ford Cobra Jet rather than the Corvette-sourced small-block in this car.

In their purest, most full-blooded forms, these people-carrying supercars are, for me at least, the most intriguing of their ilk: getting four full-sized adults into a vehicle with a bulky engine, a low centre of gravity and a sleek profile created unique packaging challenges for stylists and body engineers. Meanwhile, the suspension boffins had to factor in wide variations in all-up weight (hence the self-levelling struts on the rear of the Ferrari) and accommodate new expectations in ride comfort in a car that was up to 40% faster than the average family saloon.

These four-seaters should not be dismissed as the poor relations of the '70s exotic car

world; instead they should be venerated as game-moving engineering achievements in their own right that, as a way of covering great distances at high speed, with stability and luxury, aspired to the highest contemporary standards. They enhanced the hard-won reputations of the most glamorous motoring names in the world and as such should be celebrated enthusiastically, especially at a time when the 'exotic' marques are increasingly reinventing themselves as purveyors of obese, ostentatious and ungainly SUVs.

Somewhere along the line they forgot that the first job of a 'supercar' is to create fashions for others to follow and set people's sights higher – with cars exactly like the fun, futuristic Espada – rather than slavishly pander to the desires of rich people with no taste. 



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That '70s Show

Maserati's Khamsin appeared as a wedge-shaped heir to the Ghibli. This uniquely liveried example reveals an underappreciated classic's talents

WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE** PHOTOGRAPHY **LUC LACEY**





Reality has interrupted the daydream reverie. The vistas are scenic enough, but the romanticism of the moment has been eroded somewhat. We are moving at the pace of a funeral cortège so as not to upset the owner of the only house in the locale, who descends into a splenetic rage should you thread your way past his home in something a bit noisy – say, a quad-cam V8-engined Maserati Khamsin. Oh, and now we’re turning around in the entrance to a sewage treatment plant. It doesn’t scream hedonistic jet-set glamour, but who needs such superficiality when a car looks this good?

This good? In Italian Racing Brown? With an interior bright enough to make your eyes water? Few cars could pull off such a combo, but the Khamsin does. And how. Maserati is a marque with as many missteps as milestones to be found in its back catalogue, but if you had to absolutely, categorically pinpoint its last truly great model, this dart-shaped projectile must surely be a candidate. Rarely has there been a more beautiful *gran turismo*, its outline having been penned by Marcello Gandini at his creative peak. The Khamsin appears just as striking now as it did following its unveiling in concept form (minus Maserati badges) at the 1972 Turin motor show.

Replacing the Ghibli was always going to be a tough gig, but you could argue that Maserati didn’t really try. From the outset, the new model was meant to be something that bit more subtle and more refined. After all, Maserati already had a stud in its stable in the form of the Bora supercar. Unlike the Ghibli, the Khamsin had all-round independent suspension and an altogether more opulent cabin, even if it was a bit of a stretch to label it a 2+2. Nevertheless, while it might have been softer in character, the bloodline remained unsullied. It retained the same large-displacement, low-stressed, Giulio Alfieri-designed 4930cc eight-cylinder powerhouse, each cylinder head topped by a pair of chain-driven camshafts. Four gurgling Weber carburettors nestled in the vee.

This was, of course, the final Maserati to feel – perhaps even benefit from – Citroën’s technical influence, the French firm having been custodian of this storied marque since 1968. Some of the factory-claimed 316bhp (at 5500rpm) was lost to the hydraulic circuit that powered the speed-sensitive steering, brakes, clutch, pop-up headlights and seat adjusters, but there was a generous 354lb ft of torque (at 4000rpm). The handbook quoted maximum speeds in all of the five gears at 6250rpm, and while the claimed 171mph was optimistic, it certainly *looked* as if it lived up to the billing.

And what looks. Gandini shaped the car at the height of the ‘origami’ styling epoch he largely initiated following the release of the Alfa Romeo Carabo show queen in 1968. Even so, the Khamsin was far from angular to the



point of being serrated, unlike many other ‘wedges’ from the period. There were curves, but of the subtle variety. Reaction to the car from the media was mixed, mind, as was to be expected. *Road & Track*, for example, described the new Khamsin as ‘striking’ and as having ‘beautifully balanced lines’, while a nonplussed *CAR* reckoned it was ‘unexciting aesthetically’. There is no accounting for taste.

Like most cars of this ilk, the Khamsin’s steel body was built up from – and welded to – a robust multi-tubular frame, which resulted in a simple but stiff body/chassis unit. The whole of the rear end formed a separate subframe, attached at four points and containing a massive fuel tank, not forgetting the high-pressure brake and steering system. However, for all the Citroën sorcery employed elsewhere, the suspension was otherwise straightforward: there were double wishbones and coil-sprung dampers front and rear (two per side out back), with anti-roll bars employed at either end.

Unfortunately, the timing of the car’s launch in production form at the 1973 Paris Salon was inauspicious. It coincided with the Fuel Crisis, and demand for profligate exotic GT cars had fallen off a cliff by the time its manufacture belatedly got under way a year later. Then there were political and industrial ructions at local and national level in Italy, and it didn’t help that a cash-starved Citroën axed its subsidiary in 1975. The ever-opportunistic Alejandro de



Mighty 4.9-litre quad-cam, quad-carb V8 was carried over from the Ghibli

For a while this Khamsin reverted to a more conventional colour palette, but the original brown with green trim was reinstated by the car’s current owner



*'If you categorically
had to pinpoint the last
great Maserati, this
dart-shaped projectile
must be a candidate'*





'The Khamzin isn't a pretty car in the conventional sense. It has quirks, and looks all the better for them'

Gandini shape carries echoes of his earlier Lamborghini Espada in its striking tail. Below: on the cover of *Autocar* in 1978

Tomaso then acquired the marque from the receivers with government money. He would go on to chase volume sales thereafter, but the Khamzin survived the chop until 1983, by which time 421 had been made.

What's more, it still appeared striking rather than dated. There had been relatively few styling updates during its lifetime, the most obvious being the additional slats inserted into the nose for cooling purposes on post-1976 cars. Nevertheless, it is only relatively recently that the Khamzin has emerged from the shadows of its more widely exalted stablemates. 'Our' car is one of the later, mildly facelifted models, ordered new by Maserati stalwart Mario Tozzi-Condvi. As principal of MTC Cars, which then held the marque concession for the UK, in 1976 he ordered a new demonstrator in Luci del Bosco ('woodland lights') with a Verde (green) interior.

It was the only right-hand-drive Khamzin that was ever made in that colour combination (yes, we are just as surprised as you). On arrival, the car was registered with Tozzi-Condvi's private plate, MAR 10, and it subsequently appeared in *Autosport*, *CAR* and *Autocar*, making it on to the cover of the latter in November 1978 where the unusual interior hue was clearly visible. Once it was no longer of use for promotional duties,

Tozzi-Condvi attempted to sell the Khamzin. He came up against a degree of resistance, to the point that it remained unshifted, only for a mechanic to then prang the vehicle.

Cue a trip back to the factory, where it was repaired and simultaneously received a more conservative makeover in red with tan interior. The current owner acquired the Khamzin in 1986, and more recently had McGrath Maserati restore the car to its original splendour. And it really is splendid, or at least it is once your eyes have adjusted to the assault. The visuals – as with any Khamzin – remain the big draw. Gandini wasn't above cutting-and-pasting previous designs for a new paymaster, but that wasn't the case here, even if the glazed 'floating' tail and the location of the fuel filler cap in the offside C-pillar louvre had hitherto appeared on the Lamborghini Espada.

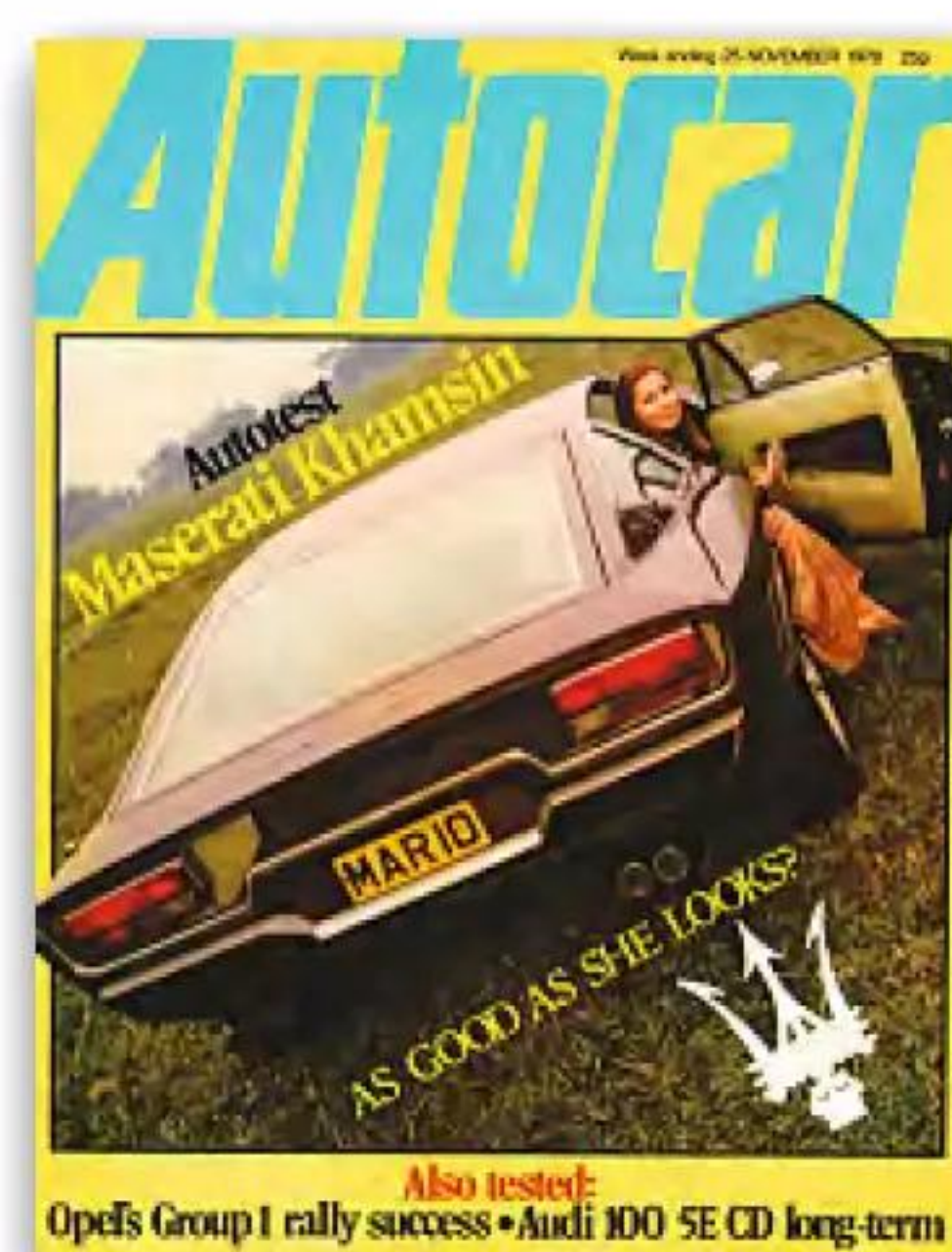
The Khamzin isn't a pretty car in the conventional sense. It has quirks, and looks all the better for them. The asymmetrical bonnet vents are a case in point: they are in place to provide a visual break and stop the Khamzin from appearing to be all bonnet. Unfortunately the USA lost out, in that impact bumpers and repositioned tail-light clusters disfigured it somewhat, but there really isn't a line wrong on European-market cars. It is hard to think

of a vehicle styled by Gandini since that was as accomplished. You could argue that he never bettered the Khamzin's design.

Inside, it is perhaps not quite so impressive. See past the super-groovy upholstery and there are compromises. The boxy fascia is in keeping with the era, but not hugely attractive. Then there are the synthetic fibres covering the dash top, and the exposed screwheads. The switchgear is also a bit low-rent, being randomly situated in the centre console. Ahead, some of the instruments are obscured, but on the flipside the adjustable steering column and hydraulic seat adjustment ensure you can find a comfortable driving position. That certainly isn't always a given in 1970s exotica; it's more the exception.

Comedy rear seats aside, there is relatively little room to stow your bags beyond the rear luggage platform. A spacesaver tyre mounted below the radiator in the nose frees some space out back, but it isn't overly generous. Nor is there much room for general bits and pieces beyond a shallow glovebox. However, that rather goes with the territory.

Fire up and you are definitely aware that the Khamzin is awake, but it is far from deafening. At manoeuvring speeds, something that is normally a chore in vowel-laden GTs of old, the Khamzin impresses immediately. The Citroën SM-derived steering arrangement ensures that you can shunt the car around with almost performative nonchalance. It is that easy.





Lurid interior is an acquired taste, but the cockpit is comfortable. Fascia and switchgear feel somewhat low-rent



The Maserati remains compellingly quick and, while its ride can be harsh, it handles exceptionally well

Or at least it is once the car tells you it is safe to move off. You can't depress the clutch until the light that reads 'STOP' goes out, signifying the necessary hydraulic pressure has built up. This serves as another reminder that this isn't your typical old-school performance weapon. The steering set-up dominates the Khamsin driving experience because, aside from being high-g geared, with only two turns from lock to lock, it also returns to the straight-ahead position once the wheel is released. It feels a bit odd to begin with, but you soon acclimatise. In essence, you *guide* a Khamsin, the steering becoming appreciably – and dramatically – heavier at enthusiastic speeds.

Then there are the brakes. Only slight pedal pressure is required to scrub off speed. It is a bit eerie to begin with, smooth modulation seemingly an alien concept, but, again, you acclimatise with familiarity. With a 50:50 front-to-rear weight balance, the Khamsin is one of the best-handling cars of its generation. If you think that is over-praising, consider *Autocar's*

verdict in period: 'Maserati has achieved notable empathy between the chassis and the engine... It can be thrown into slow-ish smooth corners like a big Elan.' Without pushing particularly hard, the Khamsin feels composed; it doesn't pitch, dive or wallow.

Prior experience informs me that the car is ultra-stable at naughty speeds, but the payoff is that the ride quality is on the harsh side. There are jolts through the structure, overlaid with intermittent clonks and hisses as the hydraulic system maintains its operating pressure. The engine note, however, is pure blue-blooded Italian at its very best. This jewel of a V8 is the polar opposite of a pushrod Detroit motor, in that it is relatively muted at a cruise but bellows with a crisp and resonant sharpness when pressed. The higher the revs climb, the better it sounds.

Not that you really need to pile on the revs, given the available torque. Below 100mph it's just lollygagging, but it's all too difficult to resist downshifting, and blipping while you're at it,

just to hear it snarl. The five-speed gearbox has a dog-leg shift, and movement across the gate is well defined, but there is a pronounced 'ker-klunk' as the lever is slotted into position. It's geared for 26mph per 1000rpm in top, the claimed maximum speed requiring you to stray well beyond the conservative 5500rpm redline to get there. It feels quick, too, albeit with all the usual qualifiers and caveats regarding its age: 0-60mph in around 6.5 secs is still rapid.

The Franco-Italian gene-splicing here makes for a compelling overall package. However, the Khamsin remains misunderstood even half a century since it first broke cover. There are some Maserati types who dislike it precisely because of the Citroën influences, but this is a hugely enjoyable drive once you overcome your initial reservations and get in sync. It might not be widely touted as a landmark Maserati, but that's only because it takes some people longer to cotton on than others. 

Thanks to Andy Heywood (mcgrathmaserati.co.uk)



TRIDENT MISSILE

Blend the illustrious, cash-strapped Maserati marque with the *avant-garde* Gallic giant Citroën, and you get the greatest supercar of the 1970s

WORDS **MICK WALSH** PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES MANN**



O h, to have been in the planning meetings for future products after the Citroën buyout of Maserati in 1968. Once contracts and development of the SM engine had been resolved, the serious business of new models could begin. New director Guy Malleret and Maserati chief engineer Giulio Alfieri clearly had the same ideas. The trident marque was slipping behind neighbours Ferrari and Lamborghini, and Alfieri was itching to move into the exotic supercar market. It still pained the great engineer that Maserati was once way ahead of Ferrari with a mid-engined layout for its sports-racers: the Tipo 61 finished fourth at Le Mans back in 1961, two years before Enzo's mid-engined 250 prototype arrived in La Sarthe.

Maserati's long-term test driver Guerrino Bertocchi was less enthusiastic about the new

mid-engined concept, and story has it he would demonstrate to journalists that his beloved Ghibli could corner just as quickly as the new contender. Some claim Bertocchi's dislike of the Bora caused delays during development, but by the summer of 1969 the reluctant tester was already gunning a prototype Tipo 117 mule on his familiar routes. The result was one of the most-sorted supercars of its era – and one of the best-value exotics today.

You have to wonder how much the merger of Citroën and Maserati, or *ingegnere* Alfieri's determination to build a better car than his local rivals, affected the Bora's character. Quality build, refinement and comfort were clearly as high on the design brief as ultimate performance. The trusty 4.7-litre, quad-cam V8 powerplant may have lacked the glamour of the extra four cylinders of Ferrari and Lamborghini, but its genes harked back to the fabled 450S, one of the most powerful sports-racers of the 1950s. The hemi-head, all-alloy

engine featured two valves per cylinder, with four twin-choke downdraught Weber 42DCNF carburettors saddled in the 90° vee. Double roller chains worked the valvetrain, with Bosch electronic ignition firing single spark plugs. Maximum power of 310bhp came in at 6000rpm but, more crucially, the 325lb ft of torque peaked at 4200rpm. From 1975 up to the end of Bora production three years later, all cars were fitted with the bigger 4.9-litre with power increased to 320bhp. Each engine required 450 man-hours to complete, factoring in foundry, manufacturing and assembly time.

One of the smartest design features of the Bora is the rear subframe assembly, which carries both the suspension and five-speed ZF transaxle (the same gearbox was also used in the Ford GT40, De Tomaso Pantera and BMW M1). To reduce noise and vibration, this is anchored to the monocoque by four flexible mountings. Better still is the service access. "It's easier to change a clutch than on a Merak,"

says Andy Heywood of leading UK marque specialist McGrath Maserati. "You can have the whole assembly out in four hours." To help refinement, the V8 was hidden under a large, carpeted aluminium cover, with a double-glazed rear window between the cockpit and the engine bay sealing out that exhaust roar.

Another Maserati production first for the Bora was all-round independent suspension, using unequal-length wishbones, coil springs over telescopic dampers and beefy anti-roll bars front and rear. The front support brackets for the wishbones are welded up to the heavy-gauge steel inner wings, which then act as structural members.

As a result of the Citroën buyout, the French marque's high-pressure hydraulic system was incorporated into the Bora's design evolution. As well as providing fantastic braking power, the same clever system raised the retractable headlights and powered the seat adjustment and pedal movement. Following that brief for high refinement, the Bora's driving position was fully adjustable – in stark contrast to the compromised cabins of rivals. Not only could the complete pedalbox be moved forwards and backwards by 3in, controlled by small levers, but the seat height and the rake and reach of the steering could also be adjusted.

When Alfieri started thinking about the style of Maserati's first mid-engined *gran turismo*, there was only one company for the job. Giorgetto Giugiaro's CV while at Ghia already included one of the most beautiful GTs ever, the Ghibli. You only have to look at pictures of Giugiaro in the early '70s to see the man was on a roll with his newly launched company, ItalDesign. Like a great painter flush with creativity, this was Giugiaro's golden era. Talks at the stylish offices at Moncalieri started as early as '69. "The brief called for a car that was clearly a Maserati, modern but devoid of the exotic look that unnecessary decorations can create, strikingly sporty but not inordinately aggressive," stated Giugiaro at the Bora's launch at the Geneva Salon in March 1971.

This was a highly competitive showdown for supercar limelight, with Giugiaro's old boss, Nuccio Bertone, unveiling the sensational Countach and Pininfarina delivering that most macho of front-engined GTs, the Daytona. At any other show the Bora would have been the headline act, but maybe it just looked a bit too discreet – right down to its Bonneville disc-style stainless-steel hubcaps. Just like its stylist's elegantly tailored suits, the Bora's crisp statement was bold without any fuss or extreme detail. Sleek, low and classically proportioned, it's as cool as a Todd loafer or actor Marcello Mastroianni; against the Maser, other supercars look gauche and aggressive. Topping the design was the Bora's signature stainless-steel roof and A-pillars, their natural satin finish underlining the car's exclusivity. Early prototypes show Giugiaro's confidence in the design: little was changed before production, other than variations of air vents on the bonnet and wing sides.

Inside the spacious cockpit, the Bora's refined statement is further emphasised. As well as the innovative hydraulic adjustment, the seat's elegant waterfall design with bold pleating would happily sit in a Milan furniture show. The slinky style is very comfortable, and



Clockwise from above: stylish cockpit; famous badge; long doors, but the Bora has a strong monocoque



only in a lack of side support can it be faulted. The novelty of the hydraulic adjustment never fails to entertain, as the seat pivots on its leading edge and the pedals move in like one of 007's trick gadgets. Unlike many Italianate driving positions, the Bora adjusts to almost any form without compromise. The instrument layout, with big speedometer and rev counter flanking the oil-pressure gauge, is clearly visible through the chunky, small-diameter steering wheel. The rest are aimed, aviation-style, towards the driver on the centre panel.

The biggest challenge for a novice Bora driver is finding first gear, but wrong-slot back into second and the V8's meaty torque will hide the mistake as it burbles off. When you do find first in the close fingers of the long-throw gate, the throttle response is magnificent. With deep, silky delivery, its reaction builds like a wind-blown fire. Only when you glance at the speedometer do you realise how quickly pace has flashed up, so refined is its punch. Unlike an American muscle car, there's no splutter or hesitation as this Latin V8 charges away with its muted growl. Most impressive is its delivery in third gear: from 3000 to 6000rpm the Bora's flight is magnificent. Smooth, strident and strong, its effortless charge is similar to that of a Porsche 928. Even in second gear it'll run to 80mph, while third will carry you to 120mph and a lost licence. Road test figures reported 0-60mph in 6.5 secs and a maximum speed of



around 165mph. These look pretty sane by today's supercar standards, but in 1971 such numbers were highly competitive.

The ZF gearbox initially lacks the click-clack precision of a Ferrari, but once warm it's a delight to slot up or down, with no recalcitrant clench out of the gate. The clutch feels both light and progressive, while the rack-and-pinion steering is direct and informative in its action. Its lightness suggests power assistance, and there's a little kickback when the 70-profile tyres read rougher roads.

In keeping with the Bora's strong, safe character, it corners neatly, with mild understeer when pushed. To get the back sliding under power takes real provocation, and you'd want lots of space to discover its reportedly edgy limits. Most impressive are the brakes. The near-solid pedal pressure takes a while to adapt to, but the instant stopping power is phenomenal. Just a dab of pressure and the nose dives as the ventilated discs dramatically chop speed.

The combination of its total performance and high refinement resulted in an individual package for 1971, one that was unique to the mid-engined supercar class. Even its luggage space swallowed two large suitcases. As a result it slotted between the drama of the Miura and the glamour of the Daytona. 'The Bora now takes over as the most desirable car in the world in which to tackle a high-speed

Continental journey of 1000 miles or more,' reported Doug Blain in *CAR*. Today it is just as easy to appreciate that contemporary conclusion, yet it remains amazingly unfashionable in the classic market as its old rivals spiral in value. But among Maserati *cognoscenti*, it is rightly revered.

"I always wanted a Mangusta when I was a kid," says specialist Andy. "But when I started working here I was so impressed by the Bora's build quality. Few '70s supercars are so well put together. Really good examples such as this car are at last starting to fetch proper money. It's one of the best after a nut-and-bolt restoration by Edwin Faulkner. Too many have been tarted up, and you're really gauging a car's value by the quality of someone else's restoration rather than originality. The best, most sorted cars are the ones that are regularly used. With the engine, oil pressure is everything – the dash instrument is no indicator. Always get it tested with a capillary-type gauge. They are good for 80,000 miles without problems, providing the oil is changed regularly.

"The biggest problems are with cars that have been standing around. The head gaskets rot, then water leaks into the bores and starts to corrode the liners. Most of our rebuilds have been as a result of this, rather than wear and tear. You have to be a bit of a contortionist to change the water pump – it has a lifecycle of around 30,000 miles due to failed front

bearings. The ZF gearbox is robust and parts aren't a problem. Occasionally the crownwheel holding bolts unscrew, which causes carnage in the gearbox. If you hear a clicking on take-up in low gears, be warned. If the clutch action is heavy, it's due imminent replacement. When just fitted it should feel light."

The high pressure, Citroën-type hydraulic system – it runs at 2000psi – shouldn't be a problem provided it is regularly serviced. It's a quality design, but fortunately Maserati had the foresight to install a master cut-off for all ancillary functions, leaving only the critical braking circuit active. You soon learn never to roll a Bora downhill without the engine running. It's essential to use oil-based fluid, because glycol brake fluid will cause the seals to swell – with disastrous results.

"With regard to bodywork," continues Andy, "we've found that Meraks rot more than Boras, which may be just down to winter use of the cheaper V6 car. Poor sill drainage can lead to rust problems, not helped by moisture trapped under the stainless-steel covers, but generally they are pretty robust cars. Even the electrics, which are a regular bane of Italian vehicles, are predominately Bosch and good quality. Most of the problems are the result of someone bodging it. The Germans like to modify their cars. The original Michelin XWX tyres are now expensive, and several cars have had bigger wheels fitted with lower-profile tyres. Better grip, but it spoils the ride.

"Likewise, stiffening the suspension results in a go-kart character. Pushed to the limit on the track they will snap quickly, but you'd have be doing something very stupid for that to happen on the road. Also at high speed they get a little light. For the UK I'd choose the US model, which has a lower axle ratio. The car doesn't feel as if it's getting into its stride until you're losing your licence, but the American-spec car feels more peppy. For me the 4.9 is a smoother engine and revs just as well. The brakes are fantastic, but heel-and-toeing is a challenge – you end up braking twice." Andy also rates the 3500lb Bora as a very safe car: "We've seen a few crashed ones where people have walked away. It would have been a different story in a Mangusta or a Boxer."

German fashion photographer and Maserati enthusiast Walter Baumer is another Bora convert. "It's a wonderful design and, for a '70s supercar, so civilised," he says. "The build quality is superb – my LP400 Countach is built like a cardboard box in comparison. A Daytona has a greater top speed, but from 0-100mph the Bora's pick-up is fantastic. The Citroën features seem funny at first, but you get used to them. The car has wonderful balance until you reach the limit, and for track days the rear suspension is a little soft. Once stiffened it's fantastic."

I couldn't agree more with Andy and Walter. Around leafy Hertfordshire back lanes, the Bora is ultimately frustrating: it demands a bolder landscape with smooth, open mountain roads. Forget the Miura to live out those *The Italian Job* fantasies. This big-hearted machine would be far more satisfying to gun to the Alps, then over to Italy and back. Anyone who says supercars can't be refined, relaxing and fast has never driven a Bora. Little wonder the Maserati Club regularly organises international rallies on the Continent.

'Sleek, low and classically proportioned, it looks as cool as a Todd loafer or actor Marcello Mastroianni'

The Bora handles well and without drama, while its refined V8 delivers effortless speed

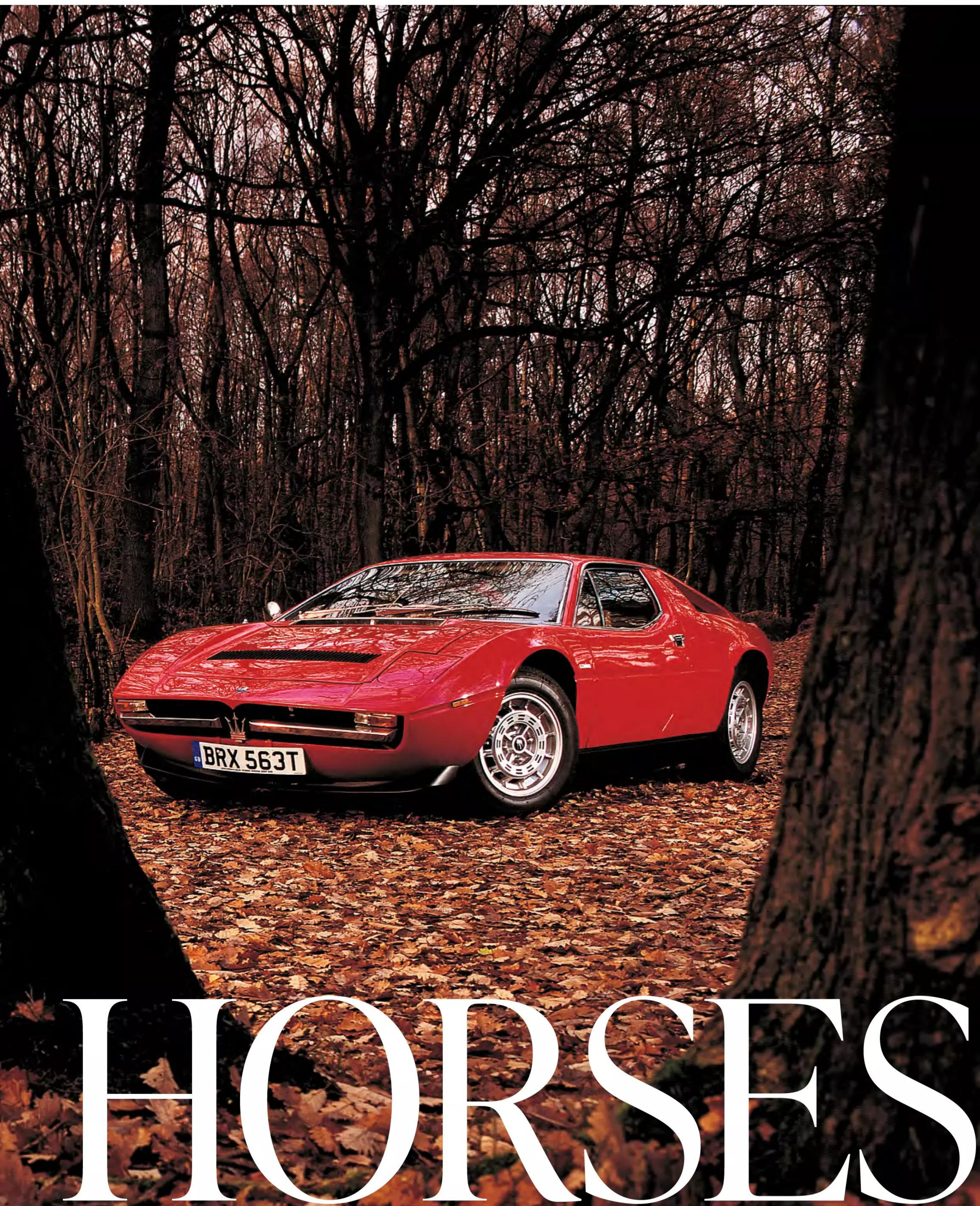


DARK

Maserati's Merak and Ferrari's 308GT4 led the 'junior supercar' boom of the 1970s, but they're more than just cheap substitutes for a Bora or Boxer

WORDS **ANDREW NOAKES** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**





HORSES

Jealousy being the powerful driver that it is, simply acquiring a mid-engined Italian supercar might be enough to terminate friendships and alienate family members. With your social circle stripped to the bare minimum, the presence of just one passenger seat would be no handicap, but if you can contrive to keep friends and family on your side, what you need is an unselfish supercar.

For 10 years the answer wasn't Italian or mid-engined at all. Though bigger, faster four-seaters were always on offer, few could match the handy size and sporting nature of a Porsche 911. But all that changed in the early 1970s.

Maserati got there first. Citroën had taken over the Modena marque in the late 1960s, and the Citroën-influenced Bora of 1971 sired the Merak the following year. This kept much of the Bora's Giorgetto Giugiaro styling and steel monocoque, but squeezed a second pair of seats into a lengthened cabin, behind which there was a horizontal engine cover and two removable flying buttresses to replace the Bora's heavy glasshouse. With a spacesaver spare mounted over the gearbox, that meant there was a useful luggage space in the nose.

Space for the extra seats was liberated by swapping the Bora's 4.7-litre V8 for a much more compact 90° V6. Although a right-angle between the cylinder banks might seem like the wrong configuration for a V6, there was method in Maserati's madness: so designed, the V6 could share some of the tooling already in place for making the V8s, in turn minimising production costs. In 2.7-litre form, the engine

had already seen service in the Citroën SM, but for the Merak it was bored out to a full 3 litres and developed 190bhp.

The SM also donated its dashboard and single-spoke steering wheel on pre-'75 cars, and, like the Bora, the Merak used Citroën-sourced high-pressure hydraulics to power the brakes, assist the clutch and raise the pop-up headlights. The Bora's hydraulic seat and pedal adjustment were dropped from the Merak to keep costs down.

Both cost and weight were further reduced by simplifying the tubular engine subframe, helping the Merak to a 500lb weight advantage over the hefty Bora. Even so, it struggled to keep up with a spaceframe lightweight such as Ferrari's 246GT, and by the end of 1973, the firm had announced an even quicker Dino.

The Dino 308GT4 mirrored the Maserati in that it squashed in a second pair of seats ahead of its mid-mounted engine, but there the similarities ended. The Maranello machine reflected previous Dino practice, with the spare wheel housed in the front and luggage space in the tail, behind a transverse engine – although that unit was a 3-litre V8 instead of the Dino 246's 65° V6. Purists noted with some concern that the V8's four camshafts were driven not by chains but by toothed belts – and that wasn't their only problem with the new Dino.

It was styled by Bertone rather than Pininfarina – the first Ferrari that the firm had styled for years, although it did the neat Fiat Dino Coupé in 1967. With Marcello Gandini in charge of the Dino's shape, the result was a wide, sharp-edged wedge shape with hints of

EXOTIC DOUBLES AS A DAILY DRIVER DAVID NEWTH



David Newth is a serial owner of Italian cars. For years he has driven Alfa Romeo GTVs, and he still has a 1750 as everyday transport. His association with Ferrari started more

than 40 years ago. He recalls: "I rented a Dino from Avis, a 206, as a birthday present to myself. I thought it was underpowered." This 1980 308GT4, one of a handful built with a luggage platform instead of rear seats, came from Talacrest in 2001. "It was white," David explains, "and they said they'd paint it silver or red – whichever the buyer wanted." The buyer opted for silver, but barely used the Dino before selling it on. David took over the car three years ago with 36,000 miles on the clock and has added 6000, even driving to work every day in the summer, but he feels it's time to move on. "The Merak is pretty," he says with a sideways look. "I've often thought I'd like one."

'The Merak has no answer for the 308's greater power and much lighter weight. The Maserati, in contrast, is easier to drive and easier to drive quickly'



Merak's neat Giugiaro styling kept much of its Bora sibling's profile, but with flying buttresses at the rear instead of glass; Citroën-type powered brakes take some getting used to, but work well

Well-balanced lines of the 308GT4, styled by Marcello Gandini at Bertone, weren't that popular when new but have aged well; it's sharp, but the handling is said to be tricky on the limit



Lancia Stratos and Lamborghini Urraco. It had presence, but to many it lacked the beauty of the Pininfarina-styled 206 and 246 – or, for that matter, Giugiaro's Merak.

Maserati responded to the new Dino by raising the Merak's compression ratio and adding bigger carburettors, liberating 220bhp in the Merak SS of 1975. The following year, with Maserati by then under the control of Alejandro de Tomaso, a 2-litre 2000GT was introduced for the Italian home market, to take advantage of much cheaper tax on sub-2-litre cars – and Ferrari fielded a 2-litre 208GT4 in the same class. By then the SM dashboard had gone, replaced by a more conventional rectangular panel – itself supplanted by the Bora's driver-focused dash once the V8 car's production run ended in 1978.

Richard Bulkley's Merak SS is one of these later models. The three-dimensional taper of its nose, disturbed into muscular arcs over the front wheels, blends seamlessly into the curve of the side windows: Giugiaro's pen drew a line from the front grille to the back of the door, without ever turning a corner. Headroom isn't generous, but there is ample space in every other direction and it's easy to get comfortable thanks to steering-column adjustments for height and reach. The Merak fires easily, with a slightly offbeat engine note that sounds remote from within the cabin.

The assisted clutch is light and well-cushioned, and vision is good – the view aft is fine, with only the thick passenger-side pillar presenting a worry: road signs and traffic

THOROUGHbred EXCELS AS A TOURER RICHARD BULKLEY



Richard Bulkley's Merak SS was supplied new by Meridien Maserati in 1979. He recently took it to Italy, stopping in Modena. "We covered more

than 4000km in two weeks with a mixture of driving," he says. "Relatively slow in the Alps, and 90mph on the *autoroutes*. The car never overheated, even when stuck in a three-hour jam outside Genoa in the midday heat. The only issue we had was a dirty electrical connection to the fuel pump, which was easily rectified by a local garage.

"The car swallowed a huge amount of luggage. There's a big front boot, and we had large rucksacks inside. The trip would have been impossible without the extra storage space offered by the rear seats."

Sadly the Maserati doesn't get used as much as Richard would like these days, so it's now up for sale. Maybe one for David to check out?

SECOND-STRING STAR PERFORMERS

FERRARI MONDIAL 8/QV/3.2

1980-'89, 2835 built, 2927-3195cc,

214-270bhp, 176-224lb ft, 0-60mph 7-7.4 secs, 143mpg, 19mpg, £24,500 (1980)

GT4 replacement had more rear space, at the expense of a cramped front. Emissions regs stifled it, but power was restored by quattrovalvole in '82 and hike to 3.2 litres in '85. A bit 'normal' for a Ferrari.



LAMBORGHINI URRACO P300

1974-'79, c200 built, 2995cc, 261bhp,

202lb ft, 0-60mph 6.2 secs, 158mph, 16mpg, £12,993 (1977)

Bertone-styled junior exotic crammed small rear seats into a middle, but it was regularly updated – with revised styling, suspension and P7 tyres (plus more power) in two-seater Silhouette.



PANTHER SOLO 2

1989-'90, 18 built, 1993cc, 204bhp,

200lb ft, 0-60mph 6.8 secs, 144mph, 19mpg, £39,850 (1990)

The styling doesn't quite gel, but there are few complaints about performance or manners thanks to viscous-coupled 4WD and Sierra Cosworth power. Super rare, so pricey.



PORSCHE 911SC

1978-'83, 57,972 built, 2994cc, 180-204bhp,

196lb ft, 0-60mph 6.3 secs, 142mph, 18mpg, £16,732 (1981)

Evergreen sports car kept getting better. The 3-litre SC blends pace and sensational steering with solid reliability. 'Wow' factor doesn't match the Italian exotics.



LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO

1980-'87, 3155 built, 2174cc, 215bhp,

220lb ft, 0-60mph 5.4 secs, 152mph, 23mpg, £23,440 (1986)

Giugiaro's original wonder wedge has more character than the later makeover and formidable grunt – it's the quickest of this set, with sharp handling.



ALPINE GTA TURBO/A610

1986-'95, 18,266 built, 2975cc, 250bhp,

258lb ft, 0-60mph 5.6 secs, 161mph, 21mpg, £31,720 (1991)

French take on Lotus principles, with a steel backbone chassis and a glassfibre body. Very quick with turbo 3-litre Renault V6 motor and sensational chassis balance.



lights, reflected in the vertical rear window, catch in the corner of your eye. The steering, which is heavy when manoeuvring, lightens considerably even at walking pace, and the V6 pulls without complaint from low revs. The Maserati is no hassle in town but comes alive when the road opens. The low-rev mish-mash of cam chains and valve clatter solidifies into a hard-edged wail, and the V6 gets a second wind. The zero-travel brake pedal, alien at first, quickly turns into a trusted ally: wiping off speed becomes more a thought process than a physical action. Only an indistinct rod-and-cable gearchange spoils the fun, although in practice there's little danger of wrong-slotting.

The signature, open-gated gearchange of David's Dino needs care, too, even if it feels far superior in action: the Ferrari swaps cogs with the precise, well-oiled feel of a rifle bolt. But the speed of the shift is no faster than the Maserati's, and quickly stop-start driving becomes a chore because of the heavy, long-travel clutch – no high-pressure hydraulics here – and the engine's tardy low-rev response.

Further up the range, the Ferrari V8, with its

flat-plane crank, starts to make its case. It has a sharpness and a musicality that the Maserati V6 can't match, and the Merak has no answer to the 308's raw pace, due to a combination of greater power output and much lighter weight.

That weight advantage is the key to the GT4's appeal. It gives the little Ferrari (Dinos gained Prancing Horse badges in 1976) more get-up-and-go than the Merak, and it allows the Dino to answer the helm with a sharpness and a precision that the Merak can't match. At sensible speeds it feels alive and responsive, although period tests argued that the Dino's sharpness was bordering on tricky once the limit was breached. The Maserati, in contrast, is easier to drive – and easier to drive quickly.

Whether the passengers crammed into the rear seats would enjoy the experience, in either car, is quite another matter. But then, they should be thankful there's space for them at all. These are still supercars, after all, and they're still a little bit selfish. 

Thanks to the Maserati Club (maseratclub.co.uk);

Mike Wheeler at Rardley Motors (rardleymotors.com)



FERRARI DINO 308GT4

Body/chassis tubular steel chassis, steel body with aluminium bonnet and engine cover

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 2927cc 90° V8, four Weber 40DCNF carburettors

Max power 250bhp @ 7700rpm

Max torque 210lb ft @ 5000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual transaxle, RWD

Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 14ft 1¼in (4300mm)

Width 5ft 7¼in (1710mm)

Height 3ft 11½in (1210mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 4in (2550mm)

Weight 2833lb (1285kg)

0-60mph 6.4 secs

Top speed 152mph **Mpg** 19

Price new £17,534

MASERATI MERAK SS

Body/chassis steel monocoque, tubular steel engine subframe

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 2965cc 90° V6, three Weber 44DCNF carburettors

Max power 220bhp @ 6500rpm

Max torque 199lb ft @ 4400rpm

Transmission five-speed manual transaxle, RWD

Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated discs, with power assistance

Length 14ft 2½in (4335mm)

Width 5ft 9¾in (1770mm)

Height 3ft 8¾in (1135mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 6¼in (2600mm)

Weight 3087lb (1400kg)

0-60mph 7.8 secs

Top speed 154mph **Mpg** 22

Price new £18,096



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1975 BMW E3 3.3L (RHD)
THE FLAGSHIP EXECUTIVE SALOON OF ITS ERA
POA

FRUA'S FAMILY *Supercar*





This Frua Quattroporte, an exclusive special commission by the Aga Khan, is the living embodiment of 1970s supersaloon excess

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **PAWEL LITWINSKI**

By the early 1970s, the fashion among the very wealthy for having bespoke motor cars built to their own tastes and requirements had all but died out. The reason was obvious: expensive, series-produced luxury cars were becoming so uniformly excellent that having a 'special' laboriously handmade by artisans, whose labour no longer came cheaply, looked a bit superfluous and indulgent. Neither was it quite as socially acceptable to flaunt your wealth as it had been in the 1950s and '60s, what with the rise of politically motivated terror groups across Europe. In this climate, standing out from the crowd had certain long-term health implications. Thus, if the international salons were still replete with one-off showstoppers and dream cars, few were being built to the instructions of individual private customers.

The Aga Khan IV, earthly incarnation of the Divine among his 15 million followers around the world, was one of a select few who still either felt immune to these developments or simply didn't care. Despite his prince-without-a-realm status, the 49th Nizari Ismaili Imam was one of the world's richest royals, famed for his yachts, his stud-farms and (inevitably) his private island. His playboy credentials had perhaps not reached the extremes of his late father, Aly Khan (who crashed his Lancia Flaminia GT into a Simca in 1960), but he certainly had a good crack at it. And, like any good international rich-kid, he had a colourful track record of commissions for opulent, special-bodied cars, including a Maserati 5000GT designed by his friend Pietro Frua.

So the Frua-bodied Maserati saloon you see here fitted the bill perfectly. It was clean and modern-looking, yet somehow regal at the same time, and it perhaps seemed appropriate personal transport for a man who was approaching 40 and still on wife number one.

Frua had, of course, styled the first 1963-'70 Quattroporte and was one of the most favoured of all the *couturiers* working on the classic Maserati chassis, with a CV that included the Mistral, three 3500GT show cars, two 5000GTs and a prolific 27 bodies on the 2-litre cars of the '50s. He sketched the proposal for this second-generation four-door Maserati in 1970.

In fact, it was the sister Quattroporte to this car, AM121 002, that the Aga Khan saw at the Geneva Salon in 1972 – although it had made its debut in Paris a year earlier. He was dissuaded

from buying it by *Signor* Frua, who told him that it was built from secondhand parts. So the prince commissioned another, chassis AM121 004, the featured car, which has been part of Bruce Milner's Los Angeles collection for nine years. For a while, Milner owned both Frua Quattroportes: the Indy-style wheels give away the earlier car, while 004 has Ghibli-style alloys.

The Aga Khan's brief to Maserati was that his new car had to be good for more than 250kph (155mph) and 0-60mph in less than 7 secs, yet have more room inside than the standard factory Quattroporte that had just gone out of production. For this project, Maserati supplied a special extended version of the Indy chassis, coded AM121, a construction of tubular steel and monocoque box-sections not unlike the old Quattroporte's underpinnings, but with Citroën high-pressure hydraulics for the brakes. The French company had bought Maserati in 1967 and was beginning to exert some influence over the engineering. Frua's proposal for a new Quattroporte was almost certainly a victim of this policy of 'Citroënisation' at Maserati: his design was usurped by a much less attractive, Bertone-styled Quattroporte II 'production' model (if you can call 14 cars a production run) based on the front-drive, V6-engined SM.

The Aga Khan had a lengthy wait for his new machine. Maserati didn't supply the chassis to Frua until November 1973, and the finished car, panelled in aluminium, was not delivered until September 1974, at a total cost of 18million lire. The project generated quite a lot of exasperated correspondence from the Aga Khan's office in Paris, but presumably he was pleased with the result, which featured the latest 4.9-litre, 330bhp Bora-type four-camshaft V8 rather than the 4.7-litre unit used in the original Paris/Geneva show car. That earlier example, chassis 002, was displayed at the Barcelona show in 1973 and has subsequently been attributed to Juan Carlos, the King of Spain, although officially it appears to have been a Spanish government car.

At some point during the 1970s, the Aga Khan gifted the dark-blue 4.9-litre Quattroporte to his favourite jockey, Yves Saint-Martin. Via a third owner, it ended up at an auction in Paris in 1989, and then spent 10 years in the Geneva International Automobile Museum before finding its way to Alfred Brener's collection in Texas, USA. Brener bought chassis 002 to keep it company in 2000, but by 2005 Californian collector Milner, quietly assembling perhaps the world's finest collection of rare four-door

exotics, had acquired both of the Frua Quattroportes – although they were billeted together only fleetingly in his fortress-like Los Angeles warehouse.

Angular but beautifully proportioned, the Frua shape has a deep, six-light glasshouse and a slim body with pronounced wheelarch flares. The hooded quad headlights give the saloon a powerful, brooding assertiveness. It is hard to think of another four-door with such muscular dignity as this. Only the chopped tail appears to link this mature shape with Frua's first Quattroporte, and the roof is just a sliver of aluminium that allows all of that glass to appear to hover above the body. Naturally there are some familiar details, such as the Alfa 2000 Berlina rear lights and the doorhandles that look as if they are from a Fiat (but probably aren't), yet somehow none of this jars the aura of jewel-like sophistication.

Each of the fuel tanks has its own filler in either rear wing, with a switchover button on the dashboard. Pop the bonnet catch and you can see that the V8 sits well back, its huge radiator cooled by dual electric fans, while the air conditioning pump hangs off the front of the block on a meaty bracket. The power-assisted ZF steering box is mounted high on the bulkhead, and there's a Citroën LHM reservoir for the powered brakes. Like some late Indys, this car needs no fewer than three different fluids for brakes, clutch and steering.

'Out on the Pacific Coast Highway, the Maser feels strong and authoritative'

Flooded with light from that huge glass area, the cabin has an atmosphere of richness. There are eight instruments set into the deep Rosewood dash: the rev counter is redlined at 5000rpm; the speedometer runs to 300kph; and there are minor gauges for oil pressure and temperature, charging and *benzina*. The seats, with their built-in headrests, appear to be unique to the car, but the smallish steering wheel is shared with the Khamsin and the Bora. The huge brake and clutch pedals are well spaced in the deep footwells, and there is nothing excessively Italianate about their relationship with the position of the steering wheel. There's a cubby box between the front seats, and, if the glovebox is tiny, then it is at least augmented by a separately hinged door near the passenger's shins through which the fuses can be inspected.

Out on the Pacific Coast Highway, the Maserati feels strong and authoritative, punching cleanly to 5000rpm in its first three gears with some whine from the cogs and a metallic tang of aggression that is unmistakably V8, yet on the other hand decidedly un-American. It's something to do with not only the Latin cliché of thrashing cam chains working on four camshafts, but also a factor more elemental and basic, such as the firing order. The exhaust note suggests refinement and power in equal measure.

The engine is elastic and smooth, with a notably pleasing feel to the long-travel throttle

as the revs leap and shut down in exactly metered degrees. AM121 004 is well sealed against wind and road agitation, yet never silent. It is no limousine, but there's lots of head- and legroom in the back, and the rear seat is as cossetting and deeply bolstered as the fronts. Had the Aga Khan paid someone else to drive, there would have been no excuse for anything other than serene progress once the driver got used to the suddenness of the Citroën brakes, which need to be caressed rather than jabbed at. That level of control is slightly at odds with the heft required to move the ZF gearlever through its five slots. The difference in effort can make driving the car quickly and smoothly on the smaller, twistier canyon roads slightly uncertain at first. The smooth, positive feel of the power steering as it plots a quite decent lock is certainly an asset, but if you were being ultra-critical you might comment that the front feels under-damped. On the other hand, body roll is well enough checked, and you can push through the safety valve of understeer to make the rear tidily break away.

Not that such aggressive treatment is really the point of this magnificent vehicle. It was designed to be driven quickly and well on good-quality roads that show its relatively crude cart-sprung live rear axle in the best-possible light. Undoubtedly a less compromised solution would have been essential had Maserati elected to adopt Frua's styling proposal, yet it copes surprisingly well with a wide range of surfaces and scenarios because it is properly located. The car also rides more comfortably and predictably than it has any right to, perhaps by dint of its sheer heft.

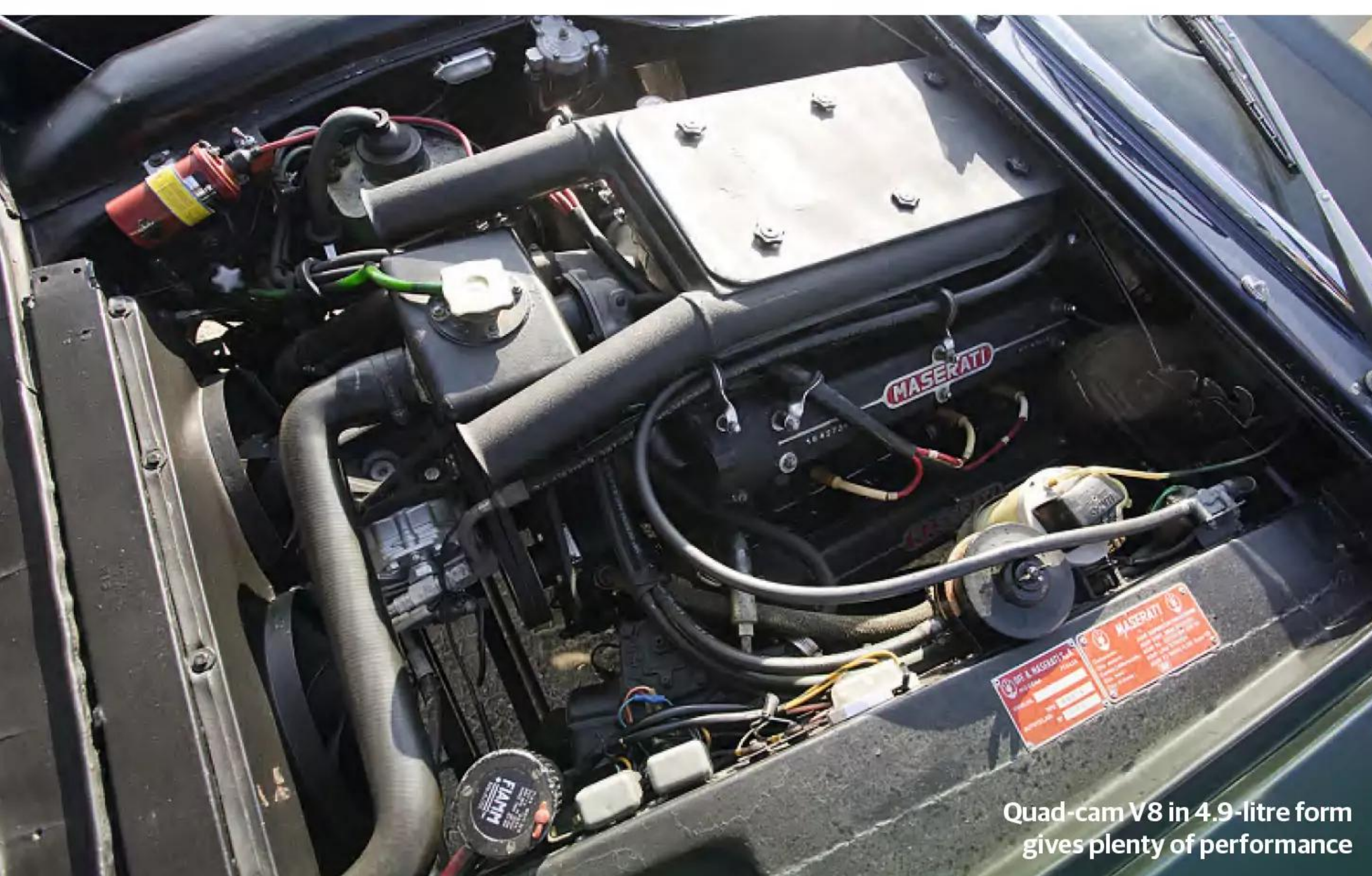
That this beautiful Maserati, with its long, deep boot and effective air-con, was a practical vehicle in its prime is evidenced by the fact that it has covered more than 80,000km. It has an air of discreet elegance that would not have attracted undue attention, only slightly puzzled looks from other drivers and pedestrians as it slipped through Paris or Geneva. In the rarefied world of four-door exotica it must rate as one of the ultimate prizes, and it is certainly, for me, the best-looking Quattroporte. 

Once you get used to those sensitive brakes, the Frua four-door is a joy to hustle along





Sumptuous and spacious cabin, with Bora-style tiny three-spoke wheel. Below, 'Sunburst' alloy wheels are shared with the Ghibli and later Mistral; Frua badge



Quad-cam V8 in 4.9-litre form gives plenty of performance



Modernists claim that appearance is nothing, and that form follows function, a philosophy that Bertone arguably took a bit too literally when it created the Maserati Quattroporte II. Perhaps stylist Marcello Gandini was being witty and ironic; maybe all he had at his disposal was a blunt pencil and a set-square when he designed this supersaloon, because there isn't a hint of the buccaneering spirit of the Citroën SM on which it's based.

Quattroportes were never meant to be testosterone-charged road-burners, rather discreet transportation for discerning captains of industry. This Cubist luxobarge is a mixture of extremes – surrounded by mystery and intrigue – that has managed to disappear from the imaginations of even the most fervid fans. Arguments rage, for example, over how many were made – five or 13, depending on who you ask, most of which apparently went to Spain and South America – and why it was built.

On taking over the ailing Modena concern in 1967, Citroën inherited a range of hugely capable but dated designs. Keen to reinvigorate the line-up, while infusing a little Latin magic into its collection, the firm commissioned the 2.7-litre V6 that was to power the SM and future Maseratis. But crippling development costs and lacklustre sales – heightened by the Fuel Crisis – meant that the project had to be justified to the people in suits. It has been suggested the reason for the Quattroporte II's existence is down to mendacious French bosses offloading this mammoth outlay on to an already unprofitable (and foreign) subsidiary. Rumour has it that Maserati would build a new and expensive saloon based on the SM platform, the car would bomb and it would all be the Italians' fault. Weight is added to the argument by the fact that a pauperised Citroën sank the firm in 1975, a year after the fêted saloon's Geneva Salon debut. Maserati lived to fight another day under the aegis of Alejandro de Tomaso's empire. And the Quattroporte II disappeared: talk of a rebirth, this time with Renault V6 power, was just that.

As conspiracy theories go, it's not going to get Oliver Stone excited. The first, Frua-styled Quattroporte had proved a modest success – with 679 cars sold in seven years up to 1970 – so the idea of reviving the name was sound. That, and the fact that the car was fully homologated. What's more telling is that it's really rather good to drive – and beautifully built.

It's a bit of a gurner, though: a heinous affront to curvature that makes an early BMW 5 Series look interesting. There's nothing ostentatious about its slabby façade, just businesslike brevity. But it's not as self-indulgent as Robert Opron's SM, and that's probably why the overall outline hasn't really dated. Chunky C-pillar and afterthought tail-light clusters aside, it still appears vaguely contemporary and would definitely look better in a dark colour – or perhaps wearing a paper bag. What's really lacking, however, is a clear sense of identity.

Inside, it's the height of 1970s chic, and it's



CUBIST REVIVAL

Italian flair plus French technology should be a recipe for disaster. In the Quattroporte II, however, it's almost the perfect blend

WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



also supremely comfortable, with plenty of headroom. Wacky Jaeger instruments stare out of an uncompromisingly angular dashboard, while its bright-orange-tinted woodwork complements the tacky chestnut leather.

Turn the key, start the engine and the car majestically rises on its hydraulics. Aim the wheel to the left, apply some throttle and a herd of Friesians dives for cover. Attempting tight Sussex back-roads in something this much bigger than the SM, and based on the same esoteric, unconventional technology – while realising that it may be unique – requires reserves of thought and concentration that would have taxed Stephen Hawking. It's traumatic to the uninitiated because the self-centring, speed-sensitive power steering takes a bit of acclimatisation – you need to guide it by your fingertips. And don't forget the hydraulically powered anchors that don't so much stop on a sixpence but a few feet shy.

After a few familiarisation miles, you make almost serene progress. The Quattroporte hasn't suddenly found form: you have. With this new-found sense of well-being, you begin to wonder why more cars weren't engineered like this – probably because of the pile-ups that would ensue within half a mile of showrooms. This really is an incredible driving experience, the initial terror swiftly melting away into pleasant excitement. The ride quality is beyond smooth in typical Citroën fashion and, though the Maserati saloon rolls even more than an SM, it never threatens to spill out of control.

Loading the scales at a whopping 3750lb

(around 500 more than the SM), this is a lot of mass for the Giulio Alfieri-designed, quad-cam 190bhp V6 to haul around. Though enlarged to 3 litres for this application (and for post-'73 SMs), it's constantly straining to keep time. Period performance figures quoted a top speed of 125mph and 0-60mph in 10 secs, but these appear optimistic to say the least.

At least one car was fitted with a bored-out 3.2-litre V6, giving a marginal improvement. In this example, acceleration is as leisurely as it is noisy. But what a noise! Low down there's just disenfranchised clattering, yet past three grand it's the most uplifting six-pot you'll hear, save perhaps a Dino's. There's a delicious metallic timbre that's more sports-racer than saloon car. The only fly in the ointment is the five-speed gearbox – Citroën's own, dating in part back to 1950 – that requires a forceful shove to engage each cog, with a ludicrously long throw for fifth. At cruising speeds, you just leave it in top and revel in that magic-carpet ride while basking in total anonymity.

Though the Quattroporte II looks destined to wallow in obscurity, it's best not to ponder on Machiavellian machinations or half-theorised conspiracies and just appreciate it for what it is: an intriguing white elephant that's far better than you'd first imagined. You shouldn't judge a book by its cover, so it's a shame that, in looks, the Maserati is the automotive equivalent of *Grouting the Professional Way*. But as a driving experience, the Quattroporte II is only rivalled by its begetter: as plaudits go, that's about as big a compliment as you can pay.



From top: styling was by Bertone's Marcello Gandini; inset headlights swivel with the steering, as on donor SM; 3-litre V6 struggles in big saloon; trident at odds with angular theme; sumptuous interior



Clockwise from top left: early Quattroportes featured 250F-derived de Dion rear set-up; Quattroporte II was a product of Citroën's ownership of the firm; the third iteration wasn't officially sold in UK; Quattroporte IV was derived from the Biturbo

THE OTHER QUATTROPORTES IN A MASERATI STORM

The Quattroporte legend effectively began in 1958, when the Shah of Persia commissioned Maserati to build a bigger, restyled version of the 3500GT, with 5-litre V8 power. Under the guiding hand of Giulio Alfieri, a heavily reworked GT with a Tipo 54 450S engine was displayed at the 1959 Turin Salon, where it received a rapturous response. Buoyed by the positive reaction, Maserati

pressed on with the Quattroporte, which appeared at Turin in 1963.

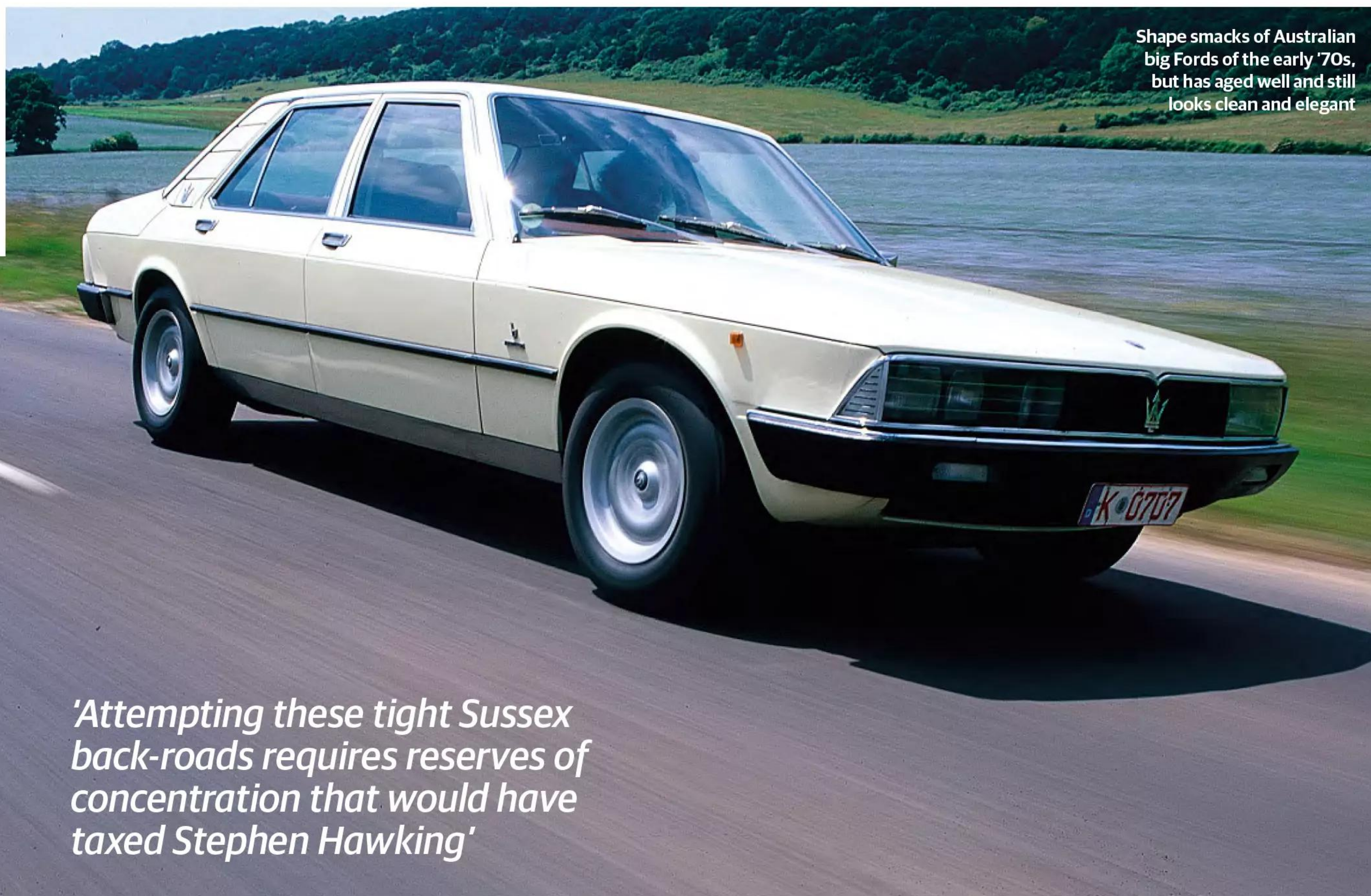
With an integral chassis and floorpan, plus a separate front subframe locating the engine and suspension, the Pietro Frua-styled (with Vignale input) supersaloon featured a de Dion rear set-up aping that of the 250F Grand Prix icon. Its 4136cc quad-cam V8 pumped out around 260bhp, and the factory quoted a top speed of

145mph. But the rear suspension's rigid mountings caused vibrations and led to unacceptable levels of road noise, so a Salisbury unit was substituted in November 1963.

Displacement was upped to 4719cc, and the interior received a makeover with more sensibly positioned instruments. The final cars reached their owners in 1971, although production had stopped the previous year, prompted by

increased competition from the likes of Jaguar and Mercedes-Benz, which had reduced demand to virtually nothing.

Following the Quattroporte II debacle, the third version arrived at Geneva in 1976. The chassis and floorpan remained much the same and it remained in production until 1987. The fourth generation sported a Gandini-massaged body and V6 or V8 biturbo power.



Shape smacks of Australian big Fords of the early '70s, but has aged well and still looks clean and elegant

'Attempting these tight Sussex back-roads requires reserves of concentration that would have taxed Stephen Hawking'



Dead. ring



The Maserati Kyalami and De Tomaso Longchamp share much, having emerged from the same stable, but are poles apart at heart

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **MAX EDLESTON**

gers



Vast rear tyres give a hint of Pantera muscle. Right, from top: bespoke rocker boxes; named for the French racecourse; familiar De Tomaso rims



Alejandro de Tomaso was an industrialist and tycoon first, and a car enthusiast second. Long on ideas but short on attention span, the Argentinian former racing driver had married into North American old money, had a feral business sense and was determined to build exotic road cars bearing his own name in his ancestral homeland of Italy. Having set up shop in Modena in 1959 as De Tomaso Automobili – and made his name in the early 1970s courting Ford with the Pantera – he was an irascible outsider who saw the chance to secure his legacy with the acquisition of noble but beleaguered Maserati in 1975.

Prior to Citroën's purchase of the Italian firm in 1968, it had prospered building small but significant quantities of refined, beautifully finished straight-six and V8 grand tourers. These cars traded on fading memories of the make's Grand Prix and sports-racing successes, and prioritised elegance and exclusivity over headline-making technical solutions.

Cart-sprung Salisbury rear axles and other off-the-shelf componentry prevailed well into the '70s at Maserati, and Citroën's attempts to integrate high-pressure hydraulics for brakes and steering had met with mixed success. In any case, they had little time to reach maturity before the Oil Crisis (and the Peugeot takeover) triggered the fire sale of Maserati in 1975.

With his feet under the table, de Tomaso's long-term plan was to build an Italian answer to BMW in the guise of the 1981-on Biturbo, a semi-volume-production 'executive' Maserati for the '80s that all but squandered the marque's reputation over the ensuing two decades.

In the short term, he focused his efforts on the most efficient means of keeping the factory doors open and bringing the unruly workforce

to heel, while stripping out all vestiges of the firm's years under French ownership (about which he was openly critical) in a post-Fuel Crisis world where there was no guarantee the once-healthy market for expensive, thirsty, handbuilt grand tourers would ever return.

De Tomaso had a hunch that it would: the continued success of pricey, mass-produced luxury cars such as the Mercedes SLC told him that, beyond the specialist mid-engined Bora and Merak, there remained an appetite for a 2+2 Maserati that was more exclusive than the German offerings and not so visually extreme as the Khamsin, which was still servicing the needs of former Ghibli customers.

He considered the Bertone-styled Khamsin two-seater to be a tactical mistake, and felt that success lay with the close-coupled four-seater concept. So the creation of an Indy replacement was an urgent priority. Enter, at the '76 Geneva Salon, the Kyalami: designed in 90 days and in effect Maserati's replacement for the Indy, the Ghia-styled four-seater that had underpinned much of the firm's sales success from 1969 until the beginning of the Fuel Crisis. The new car was based on the Giampaolo Dallara-designed underpinnings of the Ghia/Tom Tjaarda-styled four-door De Tomaso Deauville and two-door Longchamp, complete with Jaguar-like quad-damper rear end (with inboard discs) and ZF power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering.

That the Kyalami looked suspiciously like the Longchamp was a rationalisation too far for purists, particularly when you realise how few body panels were, in the end, interchangeable. In Italy, the benefit of the quad-cam Maserati V8 and a more lavish interior befitting the firm's suave reputation boosted the price-tag by £1500, at late-'70s prices, over the Longchamp.

First seen at the Turin Salon in 1972 (the prototype had odd-looking ribbed wedges of rubber as bumpers, dropped for production),



Australian-sourced Cleveland 5.7 V8 musters 330bhp

DE TOMASO LONGCHAMP GTS-E

Sold/number built 1972-'89/409

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-iron, ohv 5763cc 90° V8, four-barrel Holley carburettor

Max power 330bhp @ 5400rpm

Max torque 326lb ft @ 3400rpm

Transmission three-speed Ford C6 auto, RWD via limited-slip differential

Suspension double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 15ft 1in (4597mm)

Width 6ft 4¾in (1948mm)

Height 4ft 2¾in (1290mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 5in (2565mm)

Weight 3858lb (1751kg)

0-60mph 6.4 secs

Top speed 149mph **Mpg** 13

Price new £41,000



The Longchamp's upright and angular shape results in a spacious cabin. Below: wide arches make it feel bulkier than the Kyalami on the road



Electric sunroof, black instrument bezels and powered seats were among the options specified by this De Tomaso's first owner





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Despite their very similar outlines, only the doors are shared between the two bodysells. Earlier Kyalami (left) is free from aero addenda

the Longchamp entered showrooms in 1973 and appeared to complete the De Tomaso family. It was still available in 1989, although the cars were built in erratic batches to the tune of just 409 examples. The near-4000lb coupé, with its twin fuel tanks and twin fuel pumps, was powered by the same 5.8-litre Ford Cleveland V8 as the Pantera. It was a car of which de Tomaso was particularly proud, despite criticisms of the detail finish: the dash was functional rather than lavish, its use of US Ford column stalks a shade too obvious. Yet it was praised for its urge, space (front and rear), and for being different and individualistic in a world where advanced products from Porsche, Jaguar and Mercedes made hybrid exotica an increasingly difficult sell.

Like the Deauville, the Longchamp was never homologated for North America, where buyers had perhaps become wary of hit-and-miss De Tomaso build quality after the Pantera debacle. About 20 are thought to have been brought into the States as grey imports.

The carburetted 351 Cleveland V8, latterly sourced from Australia, was good for as much as 330bhp by way of large valves and free-breathing head porting: if you were willing to ignore the limits imposed by the gearing and redline, it could urge the coupé to 149mph. Most Longchamps were fixed-head autos with the Ford C6 transmission, but there were 17 ZF manuals and a handful of cabriolets by Pavesi.

De Tomaso owned Ghia, and it was Ghia's Tom Tjaarda who evolved the Longchamp from his 1969 Lancia Flaminia Marica show car, making it as Mercedes-like as possible on the instructions of his boss. It is hard to reconcile de Tomaso's Benz-baiting ambitions with the post-1980 GTS, with its fat glassfibre arches, Pantera-style Campagnolo alloys (wider at the rear, and shod with the latest Pirelli P7s) and quad rectangular, Audi-esque headlamps.

The Longchamp was named after the French horse-racing track, the Kyalami in honour of the South African circuit that hosted Maserati's final Grand Prix win. Pietro Frua gave it a front end with four round lamps (early Longchamps had Mk1 Granada lights) in the style of his 1974 Quattroporte for the Aga Khan. Embo, one of myriad bodyshops serving Turin's *carrozzerie*, supplied the metalwork, with Marchesi doing the floorpan/chassis. The Kyalami had a wider bonnet pressing than the Longchamp, subtly different C-pillars (necessitating a narrower rear 'screen) and a faux rollbar pressed into the back of the roof panel. Where the Longchamp wore Alfa 1750/2000 Berlina tail-light lenses, the Kyalami used leftover Citroën SM units.

'Pre-1980 Longchamps were restrained, but the GTS-E appears to have gone on a Miami Vice-themed shopping spree'

The quad-cam Maserati V8 was a third lighter than the Ford unit but a tighter fit under the bonnet, requiring differently shaped headers, a compromised exhaust (that took into account the firing order of the Italian V8) and relocation of the powered steering rack (a Maserati first) under the bellhousing of the ZF five-speed 'box or (later) Chrysler Torqueflite automatic.

Manual Kyalamis mostly had the 255bhp 4.2-litre engine, the autos generally 4.9s with 280bhp; the only external difference was the twin electric fans on the larger unit. This was the final time the classic, Alfieri-designed V8 – first seen in the 450S sports-racers of the '50s

– would be found in a two-door, although it lived on to 1990 with conspicuous success in the Quattroporte III, thanks to the big four-door's popularity in North America.

Of the 200 Kyalamis built, 44 were right-hand drive: 30 for the UK, the other 14 for Australia, Hong Kong and South Africa, making Britain a relatively strong market for this £21k Maserati when the first examples arrived in 1978. The Longchamp was around £17,000 at that stage, rising to £41k by the end of the decade. The final UK Kyalamis – including eight 4.9 autos such as this, property of McGrath Maserati's Andy Heywood – were delivered in 1981, by which time Modena Concessionaires of West Bromwich was listing them at just under £30k.

"I bought it in 2005 from a customer/friend who had been using it to commute," says Andy. "It was a bit tatty, so we did an engine top-end overhaul, some bodywork – including a colour change from red – and a few other bits. I used it like that until 2019 when I had the interior done, just before our trimmer retired. We also rebuilt the 'box with a more oil-tight alloy sump and a tweak to sharpen the changes."

In terms of spares, Andy confirms that body parts are, unsurprisingly, non-existent, but having broken a couple over the years he can usually find any smaller bits he needs: "The doorhandles are the same as the Longchamp and QP III, as is all the suspension. The brakes are Girling, and the Jag rear end looks exactly the same as an XJ6 – until you measure it!"

Doug Blair bought the Longchamp via an obscure auction in Scotland: "It had been languishing in a barn for years – I think the owner was hoping it would fix itself. I jumped on it because it is so rare and among the last made." One of maybe three on the road in the UK, it is fresh from restoration and Doug is keen to point out that it's a GTS-E, one of six or eight made (all right-hookers) in 1988-'89. That



Understated three-box shape has hints of Mercedes. Right, from top: crackle-black cam covers; evocative name; subtle alloys



means not only bigger arches and tyres, but also different bumpers, lights and side skirts.

Both cars have a certain road presence. Closer in concept to the three-box Mexico than the hatchback Indy, the Kyalami is pugnacious rather than elegant: a wide and angular coupé with crisp edges and a sliced-off tail, somewhat akin to a Fiat 130, although the overall effect is more squat, rather like the Momo Mirage.

Pre-1980 Longchamps were handsome and restrained, but the GTS-E appears to have gone on a *Miami Vice*-themed shopping spree, with brutish wheelarches worthy of a Group 2 racer and four assertive tailpipes where the Kyalami makes do with a pair. Even so, the shape is well balanced and, inside, most of the Detroit-sourced parts that offended '70s sensibilities have been banished in favour of Biturbo bits in this plush world of rucked leather. Doug has kept the interior original and it smells glorious.

The front chairs are fatter and softer than those in the Kyalami, stealing rear knee-room, but headroom in both is generous and attention was paid to avoiding the compromised driving positions so often found in Italian cars. The adjustable wheel and optional powered seats mean most people should be able to get comfortable in the De Tomaso, which in GTS-E form has wood trim; the boxier fascia of the Maserati is leather-covered, with Jaguar-style rocker switches and Trident-badged dials.

Under way the De Tomaso feels wider and bulkier, simply because you sense the presence of those bulging arches. Otherwise, they are surprisingly similar to drive. The Longchamp hastens away with a lusty burble where there is a silkier, more sonorous feel to the way the Maserati unit revs out. The four-cam sounds busier at tickover than the pushrod Ford, but is equally well suited to the automatic 'box, with its eager kickdown and nicely modulated shifts. You don't miss the extra gear and, as in the

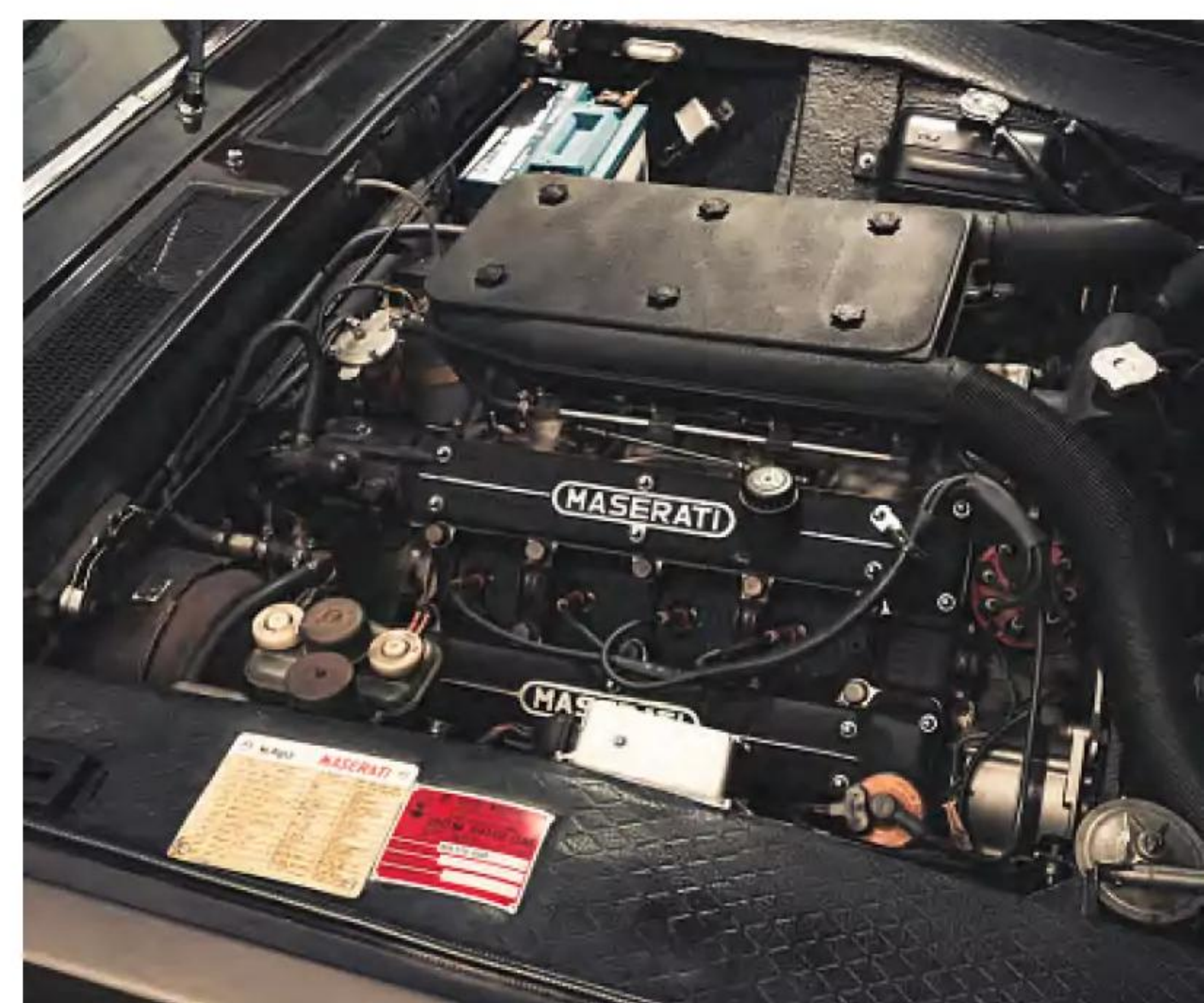
Longchamp, acceleration can be effortlessly brisk or urgent on command. I recall feeling a bit underwhelmed by my first outing in a 4.2 manual Kyalami 30 years ago, but the bigger engine makes all the difference.

Although it doesn't feel quite such a quality product in terms of detail fit and finish, the Kyalami trumps the older generation of V8 Maseratis with its steering. The rack-and-pinion step-up, while not the last word in feel, brings a new dimension of accuracy and you can place the four-square coupé just where you want it, in a way that was never possible with models of the Ghibli/Indy era. Neither car would win any prizes for a nifty turning circle, but steering kickback seems a small price to pay for the poise you get as they turn in.

You sit quite low in both these GTs, with good views out around reasonably slim pillars. Strong brakes and modest body roll allow you to get the measure of them quite quickly. The lighter engine of the Maserati should give it the edge in cornering power, but neither can be persuaded to roll or understeer all that much and both generate impressive dry grip.

The discrepancy in development budgets between mainstream GTs and specialist exotica was really beginning to tell by the mid-'70s. Neither of these cars can approach the totally developed, sorted feel of an XJ-S or a 450SLC in terms of low-speed ride or road/wind-noise suppression, or the driver appeal of a Porsche 928. But in a time when the word 'exotic' was already being used a bit too freely in relation to automobiles – and when even Ferrari, backed by Fiat, was ramping up production – the Longchamp and Kyalami kept the meaning of the word alive for a few hundred brave, non-price-sensitive buyers who valued distinction and exclusivity above all else. 

Thanks to McGrath Maserati (mcgrathmaserati.co.uk)



Silky quad-cam V8 stretched to 4.9 litres for this auto

MASERATI KYALAMI

Sold/number built 1976-'83/200

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4930cc 90° V8, four Weber 42DCNF6 carburettors

Max power 280bhp @ 5600rpm

Max torque 289lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission three-speed Chrysler Torqueflite automatic, RWD via limited-slip differential

Suspension double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 15ft (4752mm)

Width 6ft ¾in (1849mm)

Height 4ft 1in (1245mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 5in (2565mm)

Weight 3749lb (1701kg)

0-60mph 7.6 secs

Top speed 147mph **Mpg** 11.6

Price new £21,189



Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering transforms the way the Kyalami attacks the bends compared to its older V8-powered relations



Maserati interior is clearly derived from the De Tomaso, but feels more restrained. Right: slimmer front chairs result in more rear legroom



BARGAIN MASERS

The marque's up-and-down history is good news for bargain-hunters. Here expert Andy Heywood gives essential advice for buyers on a budget

WORDS MARTIN BUCKLEY PHOTOGRAPHY C&SC ARCHIVE

The concept of the 'affordable' Maserati is difficult to pin down these days, the main reason being that there is much more collector interest in the brand, now that it makes credible modern cars. This new respectability – and visibility – has spurred interest in its past glories, sending values of the cars of the 1950s and '60s – and to a certain extent those of the '70s – stratospheric. Thus Mistralis, Ghiblis and the like are out of reach to even the ordinarily wealthy.

It would be wrong to suggest that the vacuum has been filled by '80s cars, but even some species of the previously toxic Biturbo generation are now beyond the budget-conscious buyer – if you can find one that's still alive. Which leaves us with a sprinkling of Quattroportes and the 3200/4200. For the brave, they are still a steal...

Biturbo family

The hurriedly designed Biturbo was a new generation of middle-class Maserati, conceived by Alejandro de Tomaso and built mostly in his Innocenti plant rather than in Modena. Launched in 1981, its elegantly conservative BMW-like styling, plush cabin (remember the gold dash clock?) and superior tin-box chassis engineering (strut front suspension, semi-trailing-arm rear) couldn't hide the fact that it was badly made and unreliable. With 180bhp it was quick, but soon acquired a reputation for unforgiving handling: the steering was oddly low-geared, and the power rushed in aggressively when the turbos spooled hard.

It spawned a complex range of derivatives until the late '90s, by which time de Tomaso's attempts to squeeze as much value as possible out of his investment were looking increasingly desperate. After a flurry of interest, each 'new' model swiftly disappeared into obscurity, usually with only a few hundred sales, while the crisp sobriety of the original two-door shape – which is now old enough to have a sort of period charm – was lost amid unhappy attempts at disguising its age.

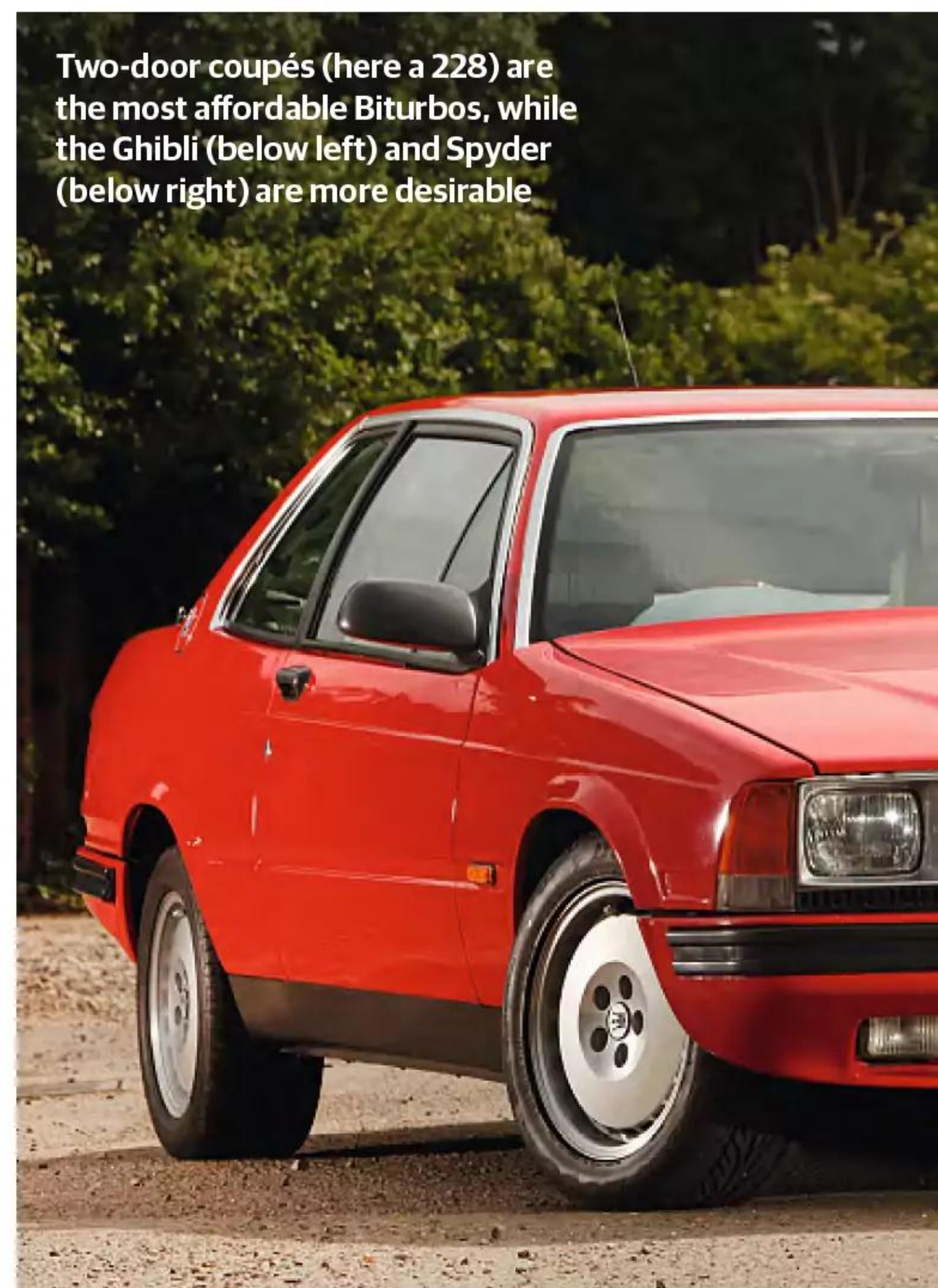
The breathtaking rate of attrition for these cars appears to confirm their reputation for comic build quality. On the other hand, the scarcity of very good examples has firmed-up values of the more desirable variants. In Italy, there are even signs that early cars are being collected and coveted.

Rare highlights were the short-wheelbase, Zagato-bodied Spyder and hardtop Karif (the latter boasted 248bhp and was capable of the 0-60mph dash in 4.8 secs), plus the Ghibli and 170mph, V8-engined Shamal, although if you are on a budget you are more likely to end up with one of the four-door oddities such as the 425, or the bloated-looking 228.

ANDY'S TOP TIPS

- Corrosion was one tradition the Biturbo upheld. It occurred in door bottoms, bootlids and the double-skinned bonnet edge. Rust in the bulkhead, suspension turrets or subframe mountings is terminal
- The V6 engines can do 100,000 miles without major problems, but need regular oil changes. Camshafts are vulnerable to seizing, and for longevity the turbos should be cooled down carefully after a long run. Smoke from the exhausts could mean that the turbo seals are bleeding oil into the exhaust. Cracked manifolds are an engine-out job to replace
- The ZF gearbox is strong, but can suffer from noisy bearings and jumping out of gear on the overrun
- Cracks in the track-control arms due to electrolytic action are an alarming safety-related issue, and the complex system of steering idlers on injected cars can seize. Trailing arms also rust
- Contaminated steering mounts make the helm feel odd as the rack 'floats'
- Electrics are a nightmare, with a vulnerably sited alternator, myriad poor-quality relays and bad earthing. The Fiat Strada fusebox was not up to the job, either: using the heated rear 'screen could cause it to melt!
- Later cars, particularly the Ghibli, were much better and even now can still be used daily. Look out for leaky radiators, rusty discs and annoying engine-management issues – usually corroded fuses or relays
- Predictably, the adaptive damping used on younger cars is not the most reliable: the dampers leak and are expensive to replace

Two-door coupés (here a 228) are the most affordable Biturbos, while the Ghibli (below left) and Spyder (below right) are more desirable



3200GT & Coupé

These coupés were built and marketed with the slickness and efficiency that increasingly characterised the products of parent marque Ferrari, and recaptured some of the glamour of the 1950s and '60s Maseratis. ItalDesign came up with a voluptuous, compact four-seater with an abrupt tail that featured distinctive 'boomerang' LED lights. With its all-wishbone suspension, this was a classic front-engined, rear-drive car, powered by a 370bhp 90° V8 with F1-inspired drive-by-wire throttle technology and Bosch-supplied traction control. The top speed was 175mph with the Getrag six-speed manual, and 0-60mph took 5.1 secs in a lunge of turbocharged urge.

The 160mph automatic – known as the GTA – used an electronically managed 'box with 'Normal' or 'Sport' functions that gave different profiles for up- and downchanges. The 3200 options list was more extensive than any previous Maserati, with items such as fitted luggage and an emphasis on personalisation.

Inside, it was swathed in leather with no immediately obvious humdrum components to spoil the exotic effect. Unsurprisingly, it was an immediate success – and a Maserati for which no excuses had to be made, with many being pressed into service as everyday cars.

A Spyder version was introduced in 2001: ItalDesign chopped 22cm out of the wheelbase to create a two-seater with an automatic, electro-hydraulic hood that disappeared cleanly under a panel behind the seats in 30 secs. The open cars are still a bit rich to be true bargains, but the drop-top model was also the first to use the all-new, Ferrari-built, 390bhp 4.2-litre V8 and early, high-mileage examples of the Coupé are becoming affordable. Like the Spyder, it featured a rear transaxle incorporating a six-speed *cambiocorsa* automated-manual paddle-shift gearbox.

The new cleaner, greener, non-turbocharged V8 had a dry sump and four valves per cylinder, with continuous valve timing control for the inlet camshafts, and from 2004 there was the stiffer GranSport, inspired by the Trofeo one-make racer, offering a heady 400bhp and 180mph.

ANDY'S TOP TIPS

- On the 3200GT, wear in the crankshaft thrust washers of manual-gearbox cars can cause them to fail, leading to accelerated wear of the crank. The worst-case scenario is the need to replace the crankshaft and rebuild the engine
- Clutches can wear rapidly because the fly-by-wire throttle makes slipping the clutch inevitable in traffic: cars used a lot in town can need a new one every 20,000 miles
- At the front, the lower balljoint is a common failure. At the rear, the Rose joint in the track-adjusting arm (part of the lower wishbone) deteriorates first, giving odd handling. Front anti-roll-bar links also wear, causing a rattle
- A seized adjusting mechanism (a separate servo motor mounted on top of the damper) is a common shock-absorber glitch that pops up an 'error' light on the dashboard
- Brake discs corrode because they run without backplates to save weight; handbrakes can also seize
- The body has no big rust problems, but look out for crash damage – front-bumper fit is tricky to get right if it has ever been removed
- Check the LED lamps: replacements are pricey
- 3200 electronics are complex and, like most modern cars, vulnerable to irritating 'engine check' lights and snags with coded keys



The 3200 and 4200 are very similar, but the early car (here) has a slightly lower bonnet line. The revised 4200 (top) was known only as the Coupé and Spyder



Clockwise from above: QPIII only just qualifies here, with prices rapidly on the up; the QPIV is a genuine bargain, at Biturbo money; gorgeous Quattroporte V



Quattroporte III, IV & V

The 1979-'90 Quattroporte III was the last traditional, full-sized Maserati, built largely by hand. It gave the old V8 engine its final home and, along with the Kyalami that shared its suspension, was the first of the de Tomaso cars that bridged the gap between the 'classic' era and the coming generation of the volume-produced Biturbos.

In an 11-year, 2155-car career, its boxy yet well-proportioned ItalDesign-styled lines proved timeless, if rather akin to a Hyundai Stellar. Today it probably represents the cheapest way into a classic-era Maserati, but it's worth remembering that it comes with Ghibli running costs. The glory of the Quattroporte III was undoubtedly its interior, which at the time set new standards for sumptuously leather-clad, air-conditioned and electrically adjustable luxury.

The 'base' car was a 4.2-litre, but the 280bhp, 4.9-litre unit became the norm, usually with a Chrysler three-speed auto; five-speed ZF manuals are very rare. There were few changes of any significance until the 1986 introduction of the Royale, a built-to-order 300bhp version that accounted for the last 55 cars and featured pewter goblets housed in a coolbox between the seats, plus pull-out veneered writing desks.

The Quattroporte name reappeared in 1993 on a new car that, although derived from the contemporary Ghibli, had fresh styling by

Marcello Gandini. It was announced with the 287bhp, twin-turbo 2-litre V6, but the less powerful export-market 2.8-litre unit better suited the automatic 'box. A 3.2-litre V8 joined the range in 1996, giving the Quattroporte much-needed authority with a top speed of 168mph and a sub-6 secs 0-60mph dash; 630 of these *Evoluzione* models were built through to the summer of 1997.

The handsome Series V Quattroporte was launched at the Frankfurt show in 2003. This car was hugely significant, representing the end of the beginning of Maserati's resurrection under Ferrari. Styled by Pininfarina, it looked intriguing and athletic; GQ crowned it: 'The world's sexiest car.' It was roughly the size of an S-Class Mercedes, but much more stylish, with interior architecture inspired by the Riva Aquarama speedboat.

The engine and drivetrain followed the 4200 model, of a transaxle, wishbone suspension and 'Skyhook' electronic damping. There was no manual transmission, however, with the *cambiocorsa* 'box renamed 'Duoselect', while the quad-cam V8 gave 400bhp and a 171mph maximum. It won rave reviews, other than reservations over refinement and ultimate durability of the gearbox – the latter answered by the option of a conventional six-speed auto from 2007 – and lasted until the arrival of the sixth-generation car in 2013. 

ANDY'S TOP TIPS

■ QPIII were special-order only in the UK and all LHD, though two were later converted. Only three of the £90k Royales were sold here

■ The engine is the main worry with early cars, so watch for low oil pressure: a proper rebuild is hugely costly. Look out for dodgy handling – these heavy cars are hard on their suspension and driveshaft wear can cause wobbly wheels

■ Most of the rust problems on the QPIII are superficial – on outer panels and around windows. It's rare to see structural corrosion

■ Electrics on all QPs are troublesome due to complication; check that everything works

■ QPIVs are exceptional value. The V8 cars are more exciting, but more expensive to run than the V6s, some of which have done high mileages as everyday cars. The V8 is a car of the plug-in diagnostics era, with lots of warning lights

■ Early Quattroporte Vs are quite plentiful, and affordable as a result. Servicing must be by a main dealer or a specialist with the proper diagnostics kit, so good history is vital

■ The paddle-shift 'box is the main bugbear of QPVs (the later auto is far costlier), with a clutch that needs changing every 30,000 miles depending on use

■ The V8 is fairly bulletproof and high mileages shouldn't be feared if there is a service history to back it up, but all parts are expensive

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The 3500GT that started it all meets the 3200GT that was conceived to continue Maserati's legacy in the modern era

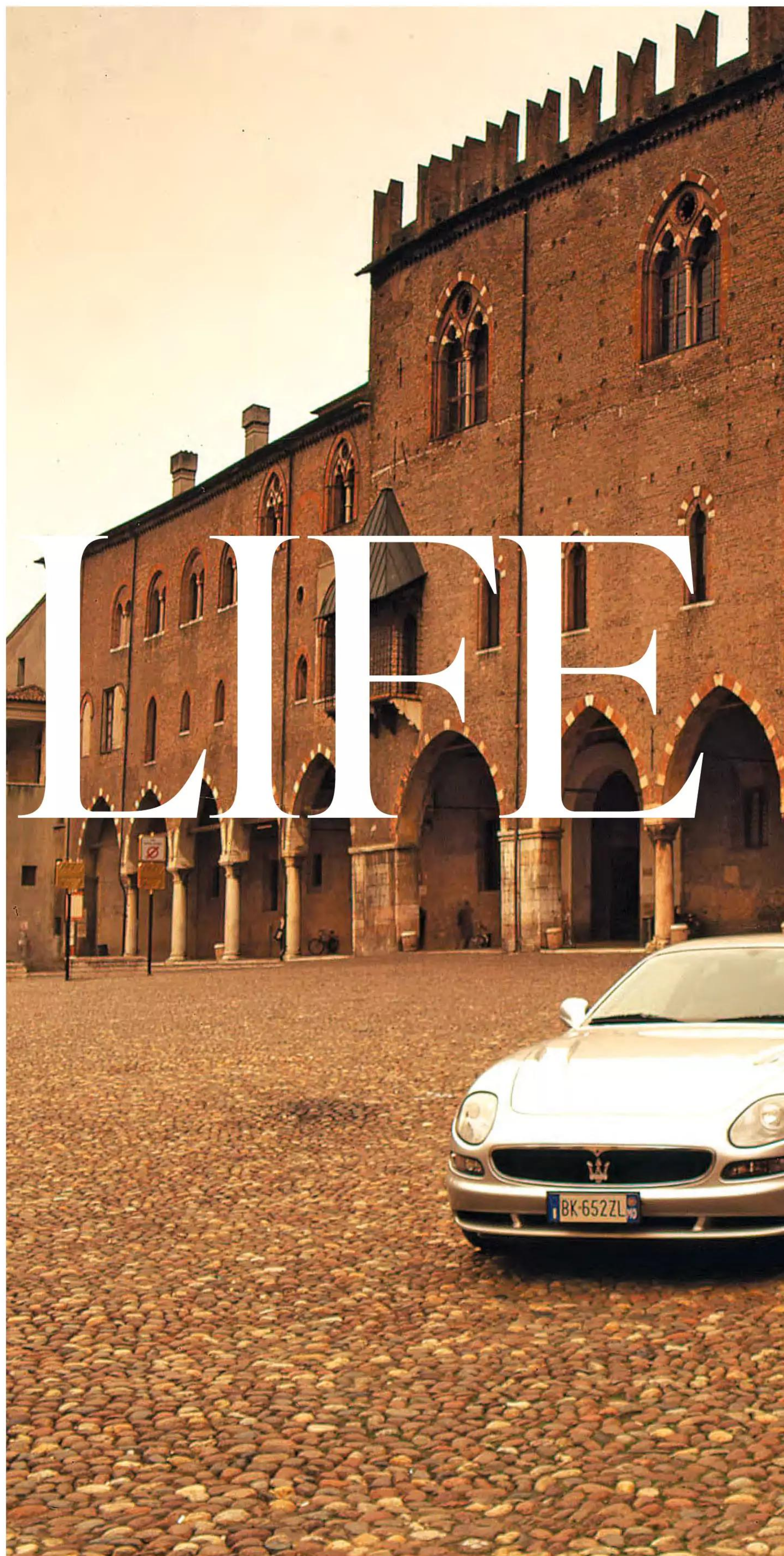
WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE**
PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

Money *can* buy you happiness: surely only the terminally naïve would argue otherwise. Unfortunately, though, all too often wealth masquerades as class, which is an entirely different kettle of carp. The seriously rich are spoilt for choice when it comes to stocking their dream garages – but should your taste run to, say, an Excalibur, you'll probably be mistaken for a pimp. Money will find you out, exposing what lies beneath. Which is why the discerning well-to-do drive Maseratis. With occasional, lamentable exceptions, this Modena stalwart has consistently produced beautifully crafted, thoughtfully conceived and impeccably pedigreed road cars since 1947.

Maseratis exude an intangible aura of good breeding that makes Ferraris seem strangely gauche in comparison. Just look at that proud trident badge – styled by Mario Maserati and inspired by Giambologna's statue of Neptune – perched within the cars' perfectly formed mouths and just try not to appear reverential. You can't: they're gorgeous. As Maserati said of its 1998 3200GT, owning one of its products is about: 'The emotion of discovering sensations that have always been exclusive, characteristics with timeless appeal, by searching for the new.' Well, quite. The exact meaning was likely lost in the translation, but you get the gist.

Yet the marque faced a battle in reaffirming its status as a major player in the big leagues, following the damage wreaked by serial ownership and the stigma prompted by the boisterous but seriously flawed Biturbo. The turn of the millennium was make-or-break time: the 3200GT had to succeed if the trident was to flourish. Not that this was an entirely new situation, of course: calamity and perseverance are etched into Maserati lore.

In 1957, Maserati appeared to be on a roll. Fangio had taken the Formula One spoils with the iconic 250F, while the awesome 450S had very nearly won World Sports Car honours. But the kitty was empty after a fruitless deal with South American industry had gone



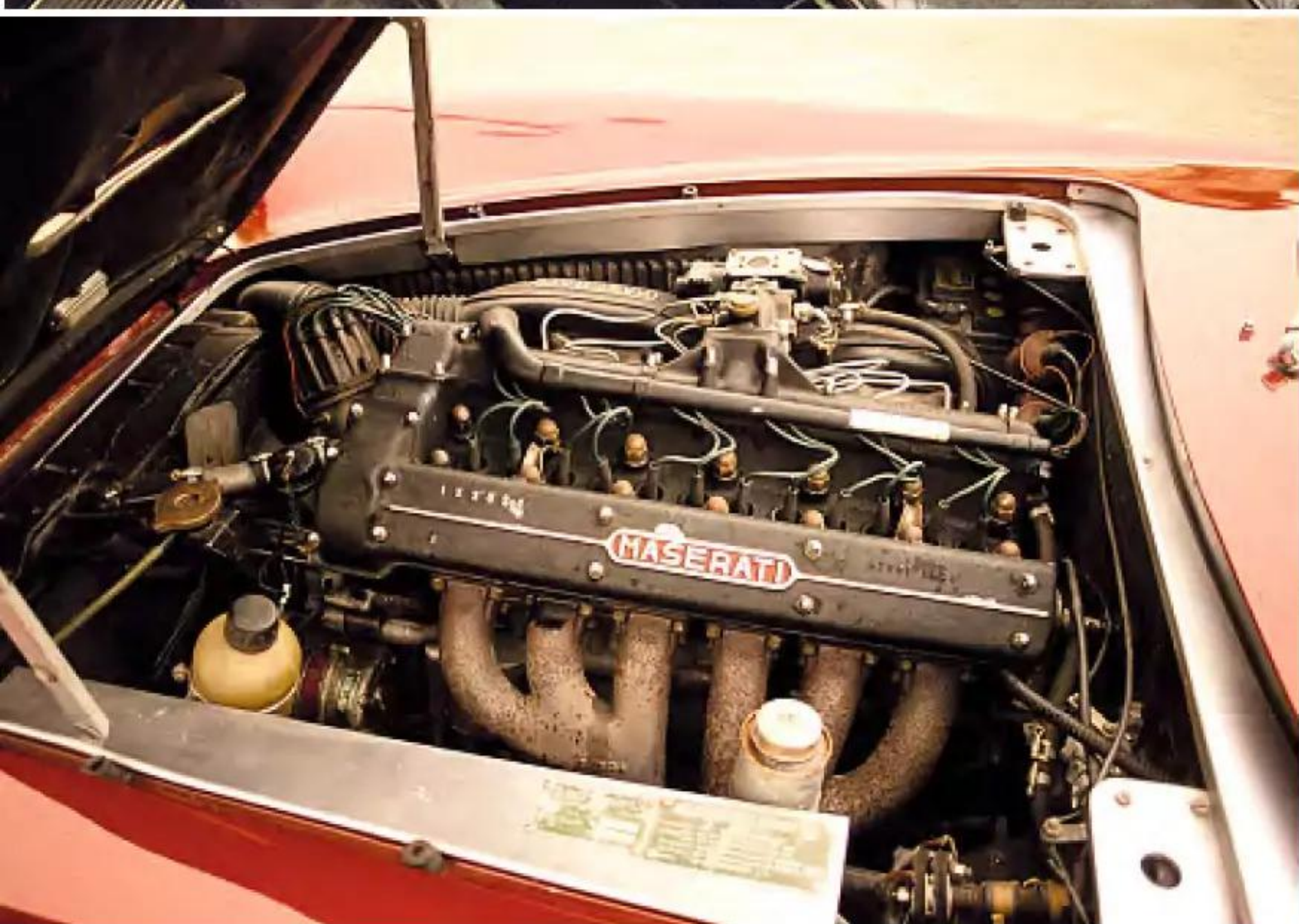




Clockwise from left: 3200's cabin is inspired by older car's - you sit high on sumptuous leather; crackle-finish castings top twin-turbo V8; arcing tail-light. Right: GT goads you into going quickly



Left: 3500GT rides well, despite aged chassis tech. Below, clockwise: comfortable leather, with Nardi wheel and Jaeger instruments; stacked tail-lights; 3.5-litre straight-six is a classic gem



spectacularly wrong. The company needed to change direction: out went the race cars (with the exception of the privately funded 'Birdcage' and Cooper programmes), and in came the wholesale move into manufacturing road cars.

The importance of the 3500GT in Maserati's lineage cannot be over-emphasised, as its designer Giulio Alfieri explained: "Previously, our primary objective had been to win races; by late 1957, it was to survive. The battle moved from the racetrack to the showroom. We had to have the car ready in no time at all because it became increasingly important to prove that Maserati was still alive. We made a prototype, did some testing and had the car out for the 1957 Geneva motor show. Thankfully, it was instantly popular and we sold around 2000 cars, which was a lot for this type of machine. I've never been one for looking back; I'm always looking to the future. But I must admit that I am very proud of the 3500GT."

As he should have been. In an age when any chancer with a scale model under his belt can claim to be a stylist, it's refreshing to be faced with the real thing: a flawless combination of Italian flair (courtesy of Touring of Milan) and stoic restraint. The 3500GT's silhouette isn't jaw-dropping; it lacks the drama of an E-type or the cor-blimey of a 250 Lusso, but its demure elegance enraptures. It's a sense that's less evident in its descendant. The Giugiaro-designed 3200GT is utterly dazzling from some angles, in particular the front three-quarter view, but is strangely cow-hipped around the C-pillars, with some decidedly odd detailing.

Yet step aboard and you're rewarded with one of the most thoughtfully executed interiors of recent times. The electrically adjustable seats, trimmed in oxblood hide, are deep and cossetting, the handsome adjustable steering wheel fronting a bank of easily legible, green-on-black instruments. And then there's the trademark carriage clock mounted in the centre. But for all of its carefully considered ergonomics, the later 3200GT's cabin cannot compete with that of its forerunner.

Just sitting in the 1950s supercoupé is a rare treat, the soft, creased leather a tactile pleasure, as is running your fingers around the jewel-like, aluminium-spoked Nardi wheel. Ahead rests a simple, uncluttered crackle-black dashboard, lightly sprinkled with Jaeger dials. Even stationary, you cannot help but marvel at the splendour of it all.

Climb in and settle into the driver's seat. Turn the delicate key and wispy plumes of smoke tentatively escape from the rear exhaust pipes, the noise reverberating off Mantova's cobbles. Heading out on to northern Italy's



The lineage is direct, but the 3500GT is more of a high-speed cruiser than a B-road blaster; the 3200GT has the appetite to devour both

overcrowded modern motorways, the old stager is remarkably well-mannered. Lucas fuel injection irons out the flat-spots, and the 3.5-litre 'six' produces a dense concoction of bluster and urgent buzz. Momentum is built by piling on the revs, and the taut, snicking movement of the four-speed ZF 'box is a joy. But opt for the road less travelled and the 3500GT's flaws become evident. On decrepit asphalt, the Superleggera construction creaks and groans, and the recirculating-ball steering feels as though it has been embalmed. On entering a corner, the nose invariably washes out as the front tyres scabble for grip. Yet on its prosaic ladder-frame chassis and live rear end, the ride quality is surprisingly accomplished. The Girling anchors are impressive, too, offering fade-free retardation from silly speeds.

But for all of this you can't escape from the fact that this isn't a sports car but a refined *gran turismo* that's more at home cruising along the Italy's *autostrada* network than bombing down its sinuous back-roads. Not so with the 3200GT. Fire it up and there's a muted burble from the 3.2-litre, 32-valve, 370bhp V8. Worries that the engine note may have been emasculated by noise regulations and the vast catalytic converters evaporate once you give it a bootful of throttle: nothing can prepare you for the spine-tingling bellow as you are shoved back against the headrest. Acceleration is relentless – 0-60mph in 5.1 secs – yet instantly accessible, regardless of which gear you're in. Changes via the in-house six-speed gearbox are sublime through its narrow gate, while the powered

steering rack is infused with bags of feel from the moment the suspension is loaded.

This is sensory overload played out on a truly grand scale. The cultured engine note, rapidly rising in a whirlwind of volume, goads you on. Although this Maserati is utterly comfortable just pottering about, you're not. It's impossible to drive the 3200GT slowly – this really isn't desirable transportation for softly spoken blanket-suckers.

It doesn't matter what you throw at it, either, be they hairpins or heavily rutted lanes, Maserati's great white hope tackles everything with an almost nonchalant ease. Turn-in is immaculate, with barely perceptible roll, while the ride is beyond smooth. And then there's the massive ventilated Brembos, which offer colossal stopping power. The only fear is that, because the car's dynamics are so polished, its capabilities so massive, when you do reach its limits, the fun will be over in a heartbeat.

When new, the 3200GT undercut its closest contemporary rival, the Aston Martin DB7, by more than 20 grand. Read the promotional bumf – read the badge – and it's clear that the 3200GT's aim was to make connections with its more exalted, more beautiful, forebear – not least in the way it affects the company's future. Thankfully, the company's backroom boffins didn't forget to equip the car with a soul. Such is the lexicon of Maserati. 

Thanks to Antonio Ferreira de Almeida, Luca Gazzaretti and Huguecte Boyagis at Maserati UK (maserati.com)

Below: side vents extract heat from 3500GT's dohc 'six'; bonnet louvres have a similar role on the 3200





*'The 3500GT is not a sports car but
a refined gran turismo that's more
at home cruising the autostrada.
Not so with the 3200GT'*



FACTFILE

Engine 2992cc twin-turbo V6; 621bhp @ 7500rpm; 538lb ft @ 3-5000rpm **Transmission** eight-speed dual-clutch automatic, RWD **0-62mph** 2.9 secs **Top speed** 203mph **Mpg** 24 **Price** £190,275

MASERATI MC20

The Trident-wearing supercar returns with refreshingly subtle brilliance

WORDS **AARON MCKAY** PHOTOGRAPHY **LUC LACEY**

There's a certain freedom to being out of the game for 40 years. Slates are cleaned and expectations loosely defined, so in this case, most were happy simply that a new supercar was coming from Maserati at all.

Once Italy's leading sports-car maker and Grand Prix star, Maserati's presence began to fade when it left racing in 1957 and started a long journey into comparative obscurity, via a succession of GT cars and corporate buyouts. A flurry of ambition in the 1970s produced the Bora, and the Ferrari Enzo-derived MC12 enjoyed a brief racing career in the mid-2000s.

The MC20, however, seems to be the product of patient and rational planning. With surprisingly little fanfare, this mid-engined, 621bhp, carbonfibre-tub supercar has arrived as Maserati releases its next generation of cars under the new Stellantis corporate umbrella.

It follows the modern supercar blueprint, with a twin-turbo V6 driving the rear wheels via a dual-clutch automatic 'box and a limited-slip diff, plus double-wishbone suspension with adaptive dampers, huge carbon-ceramic brakes and some clever aerodynamic work to manage speeds in excess of 200mph. The styling is possibly the least dramatic of its breed: there are no huge wings, flared panels or exaggerated air intakes. Inside, a sparse



simplicity highlights the fundamentals: low-slung, finely trimmed Sabelt bucket seats, a wraparound windscreen and the sculpted bodywork framing your view.

Its *pièce de résistance* arrives on the second corner you take. The brakes scrub off speed smoothly, the apex falls into place and it settles into an urgent flow of momentum delivered with staggering composure. The MC20 has an uncanny ability to turn almost any section of road into a rollercoaster of perfect angles, cambers and inconsequential bumps, while offering all the feedback and calm responses to measure out precisely how exhilarating you want the drive to be. A whooshing growl of the V6 at the top end echoes an inner spirit of Group C racing more than sonorous supercar, but this fits with its pure sense of purpose.

Maserati's pre-chamber combustion set-up offers a highlight of the MC20's specification. A chamber in miniature helps to fire the main one, but it's just a means to an end that matches the car's brilliant fluency. Ultimately, it's this rather quiet yet great accomplishment that defines the returning legend.

Whether it's truly a piece of Maserati magic is debatable, given the number of ex-Ferrari engineers on the project, but, in focusing simply on the core ingredients, the MC20 is so endearing that it has you spellbound. 



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